IN LOVE WITH A T-MAN

By
ROB EDEN

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Author of Honeymoon Delayed, etc.

And now, comes the T-Man.

Paul Devlin, clever Treasury Department agent, is pursuing a counterfeiting gang using the inner circle of society as a shield for its operations. Devlin poses as an executive in a real estate firm as a hoped-for "blind." Carol Mayo is selected as his secretary because of her ability to "keep her mouth shut."

Carol learns the truth of Paul's activities. She already has discovered that she is deeply in love with him, even though she knows from the beginning that his heart belongs to another. Trying to aid him in his perilous undertaking, Carol is brought face to face with death for the sake of her T-Man.

Here are swiftly moving thrills with an appealing romance woven through its novel situations.

GROSSET & DUNLAP

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IN LOVE WITH A T-MAN

NOVELS BY ROB EDEN

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JENIFER HALE

WANT AD HEIRESS

GOLDEN GODDESS

TRAPPED BY LOVE

LOVE OR MONEY

HONEYMOON DELAYED

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IN LOVE WITH A T-MAN

CHAPTER ONE

Carol's voice was honey-sweet, as she said: "Yes, Mrs. Reynolds; no, Mrs. Reynolds. Mr. Devlin isn't in. He didn't say. Sorry."

Her actions, when the connection was broken, were anything but honey-sweet. She slammed down the phone heavily, took up a pencil, and with a tight grip scribbled on a piece of paper, "Mrs. Reynolds called at 11:55."

Then she flounced into the inner office where Paul Devlin's desk stood, and put the message near the memo pad. She could do what she liked now because the office was empty, except for herself. Mr. Devlin and Fred Taggart were out. If she wanted to, she could toss the picture of Jessica Reynolds, which was on Mr. Devlin's desk, in the waste basket.

She promptly did so, but the picture didn't seem to mind.

Mrs. Reynolds' lips were curved into the same tempting smile and her eyes looked up at Carol in the same appraising way they always did. And Mrs. Reynolds' soft blond hair, bound with a scarf, was the same unruffled hair. Mrs. Reynolds' attitude from the basket was no different from her attitude on the desk where Mr. Devlin could see her every time he looked up, nor

from Mrs. Reynolds in person when she came into the office.

Carol had been wanting to throw the photograph in the waste basket for some time—ever since Mr. Devlin brought it to the office two weeks ago and said quietly, "Miss Mayo, do you think that during your noon hour you could find a frame for this? A nice one."

Bad enough to see the picture in his hands, worse to assure Mr. Devlin that she could find a frame for the photograph, and take it in her own hands and walk away with it for an hour and a half, until it fitted in the tooled-leather frame she selected. To see Mr. Devlin looking at the frame and the picture and hear him say, "You have excellent taste, Miss Mayo." And to stand and reply, "Thank you, Mr. Devlin," when she wanted to say, "What possible difference can my taste mean to you, when you've never given me a second glance in the four months I've worked for you?

"When I'm only somebody who answers your phone and takes your dictation when you have any to give, which isn't often. Who types your letters, somebody you say 'good morning' to when you come in and 'good night' when you go out, and 'are there any messages? And by any chance did Mrs. Reynolds telephone—' "

The girl stooped, took the photograph from the basket and placed it exactly where it had stood on the desk. With a hopeless shrug of her shoulders, she went out to her own desk again and sat down.

She might throw Jessica Reynolds' picture in a waste

basket twenty times a day and it wouldn't matter. Forty times a day, a hundred times, if she got the chance. But it wouldn't do anything more than relieve her own feelings, for the moment—only a moment.

The next moment, she would be knowing as she had known for so long—several months which seemed like several years—that Paul Devlin liked Mrs. Reynolds. That he liked her very much. That he might even love her.

That hurt—even the mere thought of it hurt. Carol didn't know what she would do if she ever found out the truth, and if the truth was that Paul really did love Jessica Reynolds.

Carol liked to think of him as Paul. When she was alone at the office, at home, or going home or coming to work, he was Paul to her. At first, he had been Mr. Devlin, just the same as any man she might be working for.

The same as Mr. Smithton in the Winslow office where she had worked before Mr. Winslow had transferred her to Paul Devlin. Impersonal, a man who would pay her her salary every week, for whom she would type, answer phones and be both a general secretary and an office girl.

She hadn't been enthusiastic over the change, even about the extra five dollars a week she would earn with Mr. Devlin. The only satisfaction she had was that she was right next door to the big Winslow suite which took up half the fifth floor of the Mortimer Building

at Sixth and Spring Streets, that on Mr. Devlin's door was first, "Ralph Winslow, Real Estate," and under that in smaller letters, "Paul Devlin, Private."

That and what Mr. Winslow himself had said before she left Mr. Smithton, who was general manager of the firm.

"Mr. Devlin wants a girl who can keep her mouth shut, Miss Mayo. Someone who is familiar with our business. And, of all the girls, Mr. Smithton suggested you. Mr. Devlin is doing some confidential business for the firm."

Carol was pleased, of course, that she had been chosen above the other girls in the Winslow office who had been there for years. She liked praise, especially from Mr. Winslow himself, and she tried to justify that praise.

She did keep her mouth shut, but she would have done that anyway. For the first month, she was most curious as to the nature of Mr. Devlin's confidential business with the firm. For there weren't many deals that went through the little office next door to the big suite.

One a week maybe, but certainly not enough to warrant a secretary for Mr. Devlin and an assistant, Fred Taggart. Some letters, but letters any girl in the main office could have written for both of them. A good many phone calls, and messages left which Carol took as accurately as she could, although some of them puzzled her; a good many long-distance calls when Paul

Devlin and Taggart weren't in the office—yesterday, the Washington, D. C., operator had called four times.

Exactly when she had fallen in love with Paul Devlin she didn't know, but it was some time that first month. From an impersonal boss like Mr. Smithton, who had a wife and three children and a hobby of stamp collecting, Mr. Devlin became suddenly personal, then more than personal. From Mr. Devlin she began thinking of him as Paul. She was conscious of him when he entered the office, so conscious that sometimes she had to bite her lips to keep them from trembling, nervous when he rang his buzzer for her, embarrassed in his presence.

When he didn't come into the office all day, she wondered where he was and found herself asking Taggart when he could be expected. When he did not come at all, and she had to go home without seeing him, her day was spoiled.

From a boss who was nicer and kinder than most employers, kinder even than Mr. Smithton and more thoughtful, Paul Devlin became a man. And an attractive man. How she had paid no attention to him for a month, how she had accepted him as a boss and nothing more, she couldn't imagine.

Paul Devlin, with his six-foot-one height, his sandy hair, the quiet smile that played around his lips, at times became the most desirable man she had ever known or ever would know.

She loved him. She loved him so much that some-

times she wondered why he didn't know, why he couldn't tell, how he could look at her so impersonally, as if she were part of the office, some integral part like a good desk or a valuable filing cabinet, some inanimate thing always, no curiosity in his eyes, no interest, nothing but calm acceptance of her usefulness to him—if it was usefulness. For there was so little really that she did, compared to what she had done before in the big main office for Mr. Smithton.

The answer was simple. The answer from the second month of her job here—after Carol knew she loved him—was Mrs. Reynolds, Mrs. Reynolds, Mrs. Reynolds.

Carol was not too blind to admit points in Mrs. Reynolds' favor. She was admitting them now as she had many times before, she was repeating those points over and over to herself.

"Mrs. Reynolds is charming. Mrs. Reynolds is lovely to look at—lovelier than the picture. Mrs. Reynolds seems fond of Paul, else why should she call him so often or come into the office so much? Mrs. Reynolds has so much more time than I have to make herself charming and lovely—"

The girl sighed and looked around the office, which was empty as it had been for three hours, but which to her seemed suddenly populated with many Jessica Reynoldses.

There was Mrs. Reynolds sitting in the chair by Fred Taggart's desk, dressed in the prim tailored navy-blue

suit she had worn last week, with the mustard-yellow scarf tied in a stock at her neck, and the mustard-yellow gloves on her hands.

There was Mrs. Reynolds walking into Paul's office with her long confident stride, her head thrown back; in black, as she had been week before last, black that made her hair more golden and her blue eyes violet; Mrs. Reynolds standing before the desk as she had yesterday, looking down and smiling, her white even teeth gleaming.

This last Mrs. Reynolds was in bright green, a hard green to wear, but easy for Jessica. A green that took the blue from her eyes and made them green, only lighter than the dress and softer; furs around her slim shoulders; a crazy brown hat on her head—a hat only Mrs. Reynolds could and would wear.

Carol sighed again and shut her eyes. It wasn't only at the office that she saw this parade of Jessicas, it was at home when she was thinking of Paul; it was on the street car when she was going home, or in the mornings when she was coming down to work. Shutting her eyes did no good. The Jessicas remained, even behind her closed eyes.

She heard the door open, but she didn't open her eyes because she thought it was Fred Taggart coming in, and she didn't care. It was only when she heard Devlin's voice that she became instantly alert, and looked up at him, her brown eyes wide, her lips parted.

"Any messages, Miss Mayo?"

The deadness of his voice startled her, and the sag of his broad shoulders worried her.

"Mrs. Reynolds called. I left the memo on your desk. The Washington operator wants you to call."

He nodded and passed into his office, closing the door after him. Even his walk was different, Carol thought. Not the springy, youthful, confident walk that was typical of him. This was an old man's walk, and Paul Devlin was only thirty. He actually had dragged his feet going into his office.

She heard him talking, and she knew he must be talking to Washington, but she couldn't hear what he said, except for a low mumble. She couldn't see him, either, because the door to his private office was entirely of wood.

It was a quarter to one and she could go to lunch if she wished, because Devlin was here. Either Taggart or Devlin had to be in the office before she left. Her coat and hat were in the closet back of her but she made no move to get up and get them.

The mumble in the private office stopped, and not a sound came from it. He had finished his long-distance call, but he wasn't making any others. He wasn't calling Mrs. Reynolds, as he usually did after she had tried to get him and failed. He must be just sitting, because Carol could tell when he was moving around in his office.

She was used to that, and to listening for noises from his office, the sound of a desk drawer slamming, his foot-

steps as he paced the floor, the jar his window made when he opened it.

At one o'clock, the mail came and she picked up the three letters that were for him, went to his door and knocked softly. When he said "come in," in the same dead voice that was so strange to her, she opened the door and laid the letters on his desk. He was sitting, leaning forward in his swivel chair, his arms resting on the desk.

"The mail, Mr. Devlin."

He glanced at the letters she had put within his reach, and then at the clock near the photograph of Mrs. Reynolds.

"You should be getting your lunch."

Carol ignored his suggestion.

"Is anything the matter?" she asked. "Are you ill? Is there anything I can do?" This morning he had been as usual—the same Paul Devlin she had known for four months—the same impersonal, casual Mr. Devlin.

"Nothing, Miss Mayo, thank you." His eyes turned to her slowly. At first they were the dull eyes, gray, but lighter than Carol had ever seen them before. Then as they stared, they took on a little deeper color and some of the dullness went out of them.

Some of the sag went out of his shoulders and the arms on the desk tightened.

The gray eyes traveled from Carol's face to her body, to her feet, and back to her face.

Little quivers started in the girl's fingers. He never had looked at her like this before—in this personal, human way. It was as if he were seeing her for the first time.

"Sit down, Miss Mayo," he said abruptly, swinging around in his chair.

Carol sat down in the chair she always sat in when she was taking dictation or getting orders for the day. Yet the chair felt different, the room seemed different. She clasped her hands tightly in her lap.

"Would you say, Miss Mayo, that you are of medium height, have brown hair, brown eyes?"

"I would," she replied. Had Mr. Devlin suddenly gone crazy? Hadn't he been looking at her for a full two minutes? Didn't he know by that long scrutiny, if he didn't know by seeing her every day for four months, that her height was medium, and that she had brown hair and brown eyes? In all these months, hadn't he once looked at her eyes? Or her hair?

"So would I, Miss Mayo. Exactly." He got up from his chair and walked to the window. How long he stood looking down the Spring Street traffic, Carol didn't know, but it seemed a long time. It seemed forever until he came back to his chair opposite her. The deadness, that was so foreign to him, was gone. The discouragement.

"What do you think of this office, Miss Mayo?" he asked, as if he were inquiring about the weather.

"I don't know what you mean."

"Doesn't it puzzle you that we don't do a more extensive real estate business in view of the fact that we have the Ralph Winslow Company sign on our door?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever thought that our business, my business in particular, might have almost nothing to do with real estate?"

"That had occurred to me, Mr. Devlin."

"And the sign on the door was merely a blind?"

"I had thought of that, too."

"When I came here I went to my friend, Ralph Winslow, and when he offered me offices in his suite I told him I had to have a girl who could keep her mouth shut.

"He said of all the girls in the office Mr. Smithton trusted you the most, even if you had been with the company only two years. I trusted his judgment because I trust Winslow.

"I know a good deal more about you than you think I know. For instance, I know you haven't gossiped to your friends in the Winslow offices. I've made it my business to find that out. It is necessary in my line of work to have people I can trust around me. I can trust Taggart. He's worked for me for a long time. I feel I can trust you. Your suspicions have been quite correct, Miss Mayo.

"This office is a blind for my real business. I needed a connection with some reputable firm when I came to Los Angeles. So I am here and you are here, and the

little business in real estate Fred and I have done has been necessary for us to do."

The girl regarded him in stunned silence.

"Do you know, Miss Mayo, what T-men are?"

"I do."

"I'm one of them, and so is Taggart. We work directly under the U. S. Treasury Department. We Treasury operatives are the original Secret Service men. Taggart and I are hunting some counterfeiters, have been hunting them for nearly two years. Four months ago, the trail led here, so I came here and Taggart came with me.

"We often work like this—when it seems best," his voice went on, quietly. "This particular case is a delicate one, because the gang I'm looking for is a careful and intelligent one. We seldom find intelligence in crime. In my months here, the trail has been rather cold, and my luck very bad—until last week.

"Today, I've had a big disappointment again. I had arranged to get an operative into the home of some people I suspect.

"I've been trying every known means to get inside that house—without rousing any suspicion, and I haven't been able to. Last week, an opportunity opened up and today the operative I chose became ill.

"She can't go on with the job. I'm stumped unless I produce another operative by five-thirty this evening."

Devlin reached for a piece of paper, folded it once and then again, and again, slowly.

It was a Winslow letterhead. He wasn't looking at Carol while he fussed with the paper so deliberately, but Carol was watching him, watching the frown on his face, and his strong, brown fingers making each crease so thoroughly, so carefully.

"She can't go on with the job, you say?" the girl asked finally, after a long silence.

"That's what I said, Miss Mayo. My operative must be a girl in her early twenties, medium height, brown hair, brown eyes. She must be a girl who is resourceful, intelligent, a girl I can absolutely trust. A girl who isn't afraid of danger, for there may be danger for her in this. Then, again, there may not. But she has to be prepared." He looked at her questioningly.

"You would like me to do—to do the job?" Carol's heart was beating wildly, and a flush of color came and went in her cheeks.

"Would you? I have no right to ask you, and I wouldn't ask you if it weren't necessary. It's either you—or I don't find out what I want to about the case. On a few hours' notice, I can't get an acceptable substitute."

"I'll do it."

The words were out of Carol's mouth before she realized it. They seemed to echo back and forth in the little office, bounce from one wall to another in the silence, while Devlin was looking at her, and the paper which was folded until it could no longer be folded was forgotten on his desk.

"I told you it might be dangerous—"

"I don't care!"

"You can reconsider, if you wish."

"I don't want to reconsider."

Devlin's smile broadened, twinkled in his eyes. His whole body seemed to be breathing a great relief. The next moment, however, the smile slid off his face in the quick way it had of disappearing.

"A week ago," he continued, "we intercepted a letter to Mrs. Lawrence Oliver, an air-mail letter, from her sister in New York—Helen Hallor, her name is. She told Mrs. Oliver that a friend was coming to Los Angeles and asked her to meet the girl at the train and entertain her in her home for a few days. Mrs. Oliver immediately wired back to her sister that she would do this.

"The girl's name is Doris Gregg. Three days ago, Doris Gregg wired Mrs. Oliver herself from Kansas City, saying that she had to put off her visit to Los Angeles for at least two weeks, for she had found her aunt ill in Kansas City on her way to the coast.

"Mrs. Oliver, however, did not get that wire. It is here in my files, so Mrs. Oliver will meet the train this evening as arranged. She will meet you, instead of Doris Gregg, and she will take you to her home. Is that clear?"

"Has this Mrs. Oliver ever seen Doris Gregg?" Carol asked.

"She hasn't. Doris is apparently a friend, an office

friend of her sister. In the letter we intercepted Helen Hallor describes Doris as a girl of medium height, brown eyes, and brown hair. She says, however, that Doris has seen her picture of Mrs. Oliver and will know her and will seek her out as soon as her train gets in."

"And what if Doris Gregg suddenly decides to come straight on here?"

"You don't need to worry about that, Miss Mayo. All those details will be taken care of. I have the Kansas City office checking Miss Gregg's movements. We read every letter that goes to the Oliver house, see every telegram, listen in on every telephone call.

"If you can get into the Oliver house, stay a few days, have time and courage to do the things I want to do, I'll be satisfied and very grateful."

"It seems such a long way around, such a hard way when, if you know where the gang is—"

"I should go out immediately and make arrests?" He laughed heartily. "But I'm not sure, Miss Mayo. I have no proof that the three Olivers are counterfeiters who are turning out half a million dollars a year, maybe more, so cleverly that their bills are hardly detectable from good Treasury notes.

"I don't know where their headquarters are. I don't even know for sure that they are the people I want, but I think so. I've been working on that premise for four months, and I've spent a good deal of Government money—which I hope I haven't wasted—on that idea.

"I've got to have proof. I've got to find their plant,

their plates. I've got to find their confederates. I can't take the word of a man who is now in prison for ten years for second offense forgery that my search for one of the biggest counterfeiting rings in the country is going to lead me to a home in Beverly Hills—"

"Beverly Hills?" Carol interrupted, surprised.

"Yes, Beverly Hills, and the Olivers, all three of them, are respected citizens of that city. We don't arrest respected citizens without proof. That's the situation. Now for your baggage and your clothes. One large suitcase and a small overnight case will do, if they're not initialed. Do you have them?"

"Yes, Mr. Devlin."

"Take all Los Angeles labels from everything you put in your suitcase and bag. Don't take too much, and nothing that's initialed. I'll have a purse ready for you when you are ready. Identification, if anybody in the Oliver house goes through it."

He rose and Carol got to her feet, too. Her knees were weak as she stood up.

"I'll give you final instructions after you're packed. Suppose I pick you up at your place about four? We'll drive to Pasadena and you'll board the train there and come into town on it. It gets to the station here at five-thirty."

Medium height, brown hair, brown eyes, Carol thought as she was going down in the elevator a few minutes later, her knees partly recovered from their

weakness, and a current of indignation rising above her excitement. For while her hair was brown and her eyes were brown, they had never been measured so coolly before, so dispassionately.

CHAPTER TWO

Devlin's sedan was a small sturdy one, painted an inconspicuous tan. In town, it could idle down to a modest twenty-five or thirty miles an hour. But on the open road, it flew along at sixty and sixty-five easily, hardly a tremor in its solid steel, especially made body.

In the front seat were Carol and Devlin and, in the back, one large wardrobe case and one small overnight case.

"Studied the pictures carefully?" Paul Devlin asked, rounding a curve at a goodly speed.

The girl looked again at the three pictures she held in her hands. The Three Olivers, Devlin had called them when he handed them to her. Well, she was quite familiar by this time with every feature of the Olivers, because she had been studying them for fifteen minutes, each face separately and then held together.

The woman, although she didn't look much more than a girl, was Mrs. Lawrence Oliver, Margaret Oliver. A pretty babyish face, babyish features, soft features, a droop to the tiny mouth, and a wistful look in her eyes which Devlin told Carol were brown. A sad face, framed in dark hair cut in bangs on the forehead, and falling softly over her ears. That was Margaret Oliver,

who was going to meet her in Los Angeles. Carol felt she would know her any place.

On the bottom of the next picture was the name, Lawrence Oliver. She would know him any place, too. He was young, but not as young as his wife. "Twenty-five?" She asked Devlin, and Devlin said he was twenty-nine. A weakish face Lawrence Oliver had, and a weakish feminine chin. He was handsome, though, with all his weakness, and there was a collegiate look about him, an immaturity about his features. He was lighter in complexion than his wife and had a thin, carefully trimmed mustache.

Nicholas Oliver, "Nick," was represented by the third picture, clearly marked as the others were.

Carol tried to find a resemblance between the two brothers, but couldn't. Once, she thought she saw it in the eyes and the breadth of the cheekbones, but, later, she decided it was only imagination and that if Mr. Devlin hadn't told her they were brothers she wouldn't have guessed it.

Nick Oliver's face was a strong one, each feature well defined, the nose straight and firm, the lips straight and firm, the chin too firm, too large, making the lower part of Nick's face too heavy. "Forty?" she inquired of Devlin, really wishing she had said forty-two.

"Thirty-one," he answered, which told her how badly she had guessed Nick's age.

There were strong lines on his face, lines that went clear and straight from his rather wide nostrils to the

corners of his mouth, lines under his eyes, and two furrows on his forehead, more lines that went from the corners of his eyes. Lawrence Oliver she had thought was handsome, Nick Oliver—she didn't know.

Certainly in a room he would stand out more than his brother, for he definitely had personality and force of character—but handsome . . . Something in his face repelled her.

"It's Nick, of course," Devlin explained, "who is the leader. You must have guessed that."

Carol had. There was leadership all over Nick's face, in his eyes, on his mouth, in every line of his face.

"The others don't count. I want them, too, but I want Nick more, because he must be the brains of the gang. He's got to be the brains, or I'm all wrong and should be digging ditches instead of doing Federal investigating. He's the smart one of the Oliver family. Now put the pictures back in the pocket of the car."

Carol put away the pictures.

"Not getting cold feet, are you?"

"Oh, no," she replied as firmly as she could. But she found herself wondering whether Nick would be as formidable in person as she found him in his picture.

She found herself hoping, too, that he would be away during her visit at the Oliver house. Devlin blasted that unspoken hope immediately.

"Nick is the one you'll have to watch, and watch carefully, because he lives at the house, too. He's there most of the time.

"Besides Nick and the Larry Olivers, there are two servants in the house, a man named Sam Boles and his wife, Nora. Sam acts as butler and Nora as cook. Whether they are members of the gang, too, I don't know, but I imagine so. Have you got the household straight?"

She repeated like a schoolgirl, "The three Olivers, Sam and Nora Boles."

"Now then, when you are in the house, I want certain things done, if you're able to do them. If you're not—well, I'm hoping you are, that's all. I want you to get into Nick Oliver's bedroom and I want you to go through his desk, look through any papers you find there—any papers. What I want from those papers is simple, telephone numbers, names. Any names you find, any addresses, any telephone numbers, local or otherwise. I also want you to look on the desk for a memo pad which may be near the telephone, and I want you to see if there are any names or numbers there. I don't want you to copy down any of the numbers or names. I want you to memorize them if you can. You seem to remember numbers well—at least I think you do. You have around the office."

Carol nodded, but the feeling of thrill, of well-being, of contentment that she was with Devlin was leaving. She was beginning to be frightened.

Devlin went on in his brisk, business-like voice. "I should like you to go through *everything* in Nick's room, the clothes in his closet, his books on the bedside

table, his magazines, every page—if you can, for names or numbers—anything might be important to me. On his desk is a box which I should like you to examine, too, if you can—"

"How do you know so much about his room?" she broke in.

"Simple, Miss Mayo. Simple. We've had operatives in the house three times in the past four months, first for the telephone lines which we purposely damaged.

"Second, for the plumbing which we damaged, too; third, one of our operatives who posed as a state tax collector. I have a diagram of every room in the house, especially of Nick's room. However, it did us no good to get the men into the house. They weren't left alone for one second."

The sedan slid up to the station and Devlin shut off the motor. "We'll wait here until the train comes in. Where was I, anyway? Oh, yes. The box on Nick's desk. You'd better take this bunch of skeleton keys. You may need them." He handed her a key ring with perhaps a dozen keys on the ring, some ordinary Yale-lock keys, and others smaller. One so thin and small it looked more like a small hairpin than a key. Carol put the bunch in her purse.

"And the Olivers, all of them, have been invited to a dinner party tonight. Through our operative in the Beverly Hills telephone company, we've found out that they expect to include you in the invitation—Mrs. Oli-

ver made arrangements to have you invited, so you will be asked to go.

"I don't want you to. I want you, as soon as you meet Margaret Oliver, to tell her you have a headache from your trip and you don't feel like going out. They may leave you alone in the house and, if they do, you can get started with your work. If they won't, you'll have to wait for another opportunity." He took out his watch. "Fifteen minutes before train time. Is there anything else you want to know?"

There were so many things that Carol couldn't begin to ask about them. There was the question of what she should do if anything happened.

If the Olivers, especially Nick, found out she wasn't Doris Gregg, but Carol Mayo, secretary to Paul Devlin? What should she do then? If they questioned her too much about Doris Gregg, and about Helen Hallor who was Margaret's sister. All she knew about Doris was what Paul Devlin had told her on the way to Pasadena. That Doris had gone to high school with Helen Hallor, that Doris, until she left New York, had worked in a big life insurance office in the city where Helen had worked until a few months ago, herself.

So little, so very little, and so much depended on so little. One slip . . . Carol shivered. But the next minute she was smiling up at Devlin, saying in a firm voice, "No, I think you've told me everything I need to know."

"And you are not to get into communication with

me, Miss Mayo, unless it is absolutely necessary. I don't think it will be. I have a feeling that on Friday the Olivers will be putting you on a train for San Francisco, fully convinced they entertained the real Doris Gregg."

They sat for a few minutes in silence, and then through the street noises, through the traffic of the station came the wailing whistle of the train.

Devlin called a porter and directed that the two bags be put on the train. "I'm not going on the train with you. I'm going to try to beat it back to the Santa Fe station in Los Angeles. Good luck!"

So Carol went on alone, a queer choking feeling in her throat and sudden tears welling in her eyes. They almost blinded her as she stepped into one of the cars, but she was quite composed when she took the seat which Devlin had already reserved for her.

When her destination was reached, Carol saw the girl who was Margaret Oliver from the train window. She was short, very short, barely five feet, and dressed in a mustard-yellow tweed suit. On her head was a brown vagabond hat, and she carried brown gloves and a brown bag.

A smart-looking girl, with the healthy tan California gives on her face, and in her eyes, as she looked over the passengers who were getting off the train, the rather strained, hopeful smile of a person who is waiting.

Margaret in person was not so wistful, nor so sad as Margaret of the photograph.

"I'm Doris Gregg," Carol said, when she was off the

train, and walked up to Margaret with her hand outstretched. She had practiced the phrase and the movement to herself all the way into the station, and yet when she finally said the words they came to her lips strangely, and her hand seemed awkward.

Margaret ignored the hand and put her arms about the girl. There was a fragrance of gardenia about her. "My dear, I'm so glad—any friend of Helen's—you've no idea how welcome you are!" Her lips touched Carol's cheek, and then the arms fell away.

"Now about your baggage?"

"Could we get it in your car?" So different from what Carol expected, this warm delightful welcome, Margaret's spontaneous embrace, her kiss. Carol had expected a mere handshake, nothing more, polite conversation on the way to the house. But here Margaret was treating her as if she were really glad to see her, as if she had been looking forward to her arrival.

"Of course." And Margaret, linking her arm in Carol's, led her to the car which was parked at the side of the station.

The car was a big black luxurious sedan, new, and when the two bags were in the back seat, Margaret drove it expertly.

Carol tried not to look at the girl beside her turning the wheel so dexterously, swinging around this corner, then that corner to get away from the traffic, but she couldn't help it.

Margaret's profile fascinated her, the softness of it,

the babyishness, the tender little mouth that was spilling question after question about Helen, about New York, hardly waiting for Carol to answer.

The Three Olivers, Carol kept thinking. The Three Olivers, and Margaret was one of them—this girl. Paul said she was about twenty-five. Not so important as Nick Oliver, but still one of the Olivers, one of a ring of counterfeiters which Paul had been after for nearly two years.

This soft little woman with the cultured voice and the delicious rippling laugh that was so unaffected, so like the laugh of a child. This smart woman, who was so interested, so fond of her sister, that she had accepted a friend of her sister's in the same fashion she would have accepted the sister, herself.

Paul must be wrong. In some way, he must be mistaken. Margaret couldn't be mixed up in crime. She couldn't. The next moment, Carol was remembering the warning Paul had given her on the start of their trip to the train.

"I want to impress on you, Miss Mayo, the fact that you mustn't let your sympathies run away with you. Good operatives never do. You must always keep in mind that the Olivers are doing something that is against the law, that they should be in prison, all three of them, that eventually they will all be in prison, if my plans succeed.

"They may seem very charming and very natural to you, but the charm and the naturalness are only a veneer

for your benefit and for the benefit of others, whom they wish to bewilder.

"They make a business of being charming and natural. They entertain in their home for that effect. Margaret Oliver can be a delightful hostess and at the same time be a criminal. She entertains, they all entertain. They are entertained, in turn, by friends whom they have entertained for the sole purpose of building up a social background which is a cloak for their real business of producing queer money.

"To their friends, they seem a happy little threesome, prosperous, gay, ready to do anything that amuses them or their friends. Their friends think they derive an income from stocks and bonds. Their friends are satisfied with that explanation, because friends are that way, and the Olivers have made their friends like them.

"Margaret, especially, has the gift for making friends, and Nick, too. Larry accepts the friends that Margaret and Nick make for him, because, unfortunately, he hasn't the ability to gather people around him. You'll like Margaret, everybody likes her."

Carol did like Margaret. She liked her better as the car sped on to Beverly Hills. She liked the eager interest she had in her sister, in what her sister was doing. She liked the way, in the midst of the questions she was asking, she pointed out of the car to show her guest something she ought to see. She liked the swift, sure, safe way she drove, never taking a chance, and yet keeping up her speed just the same. The man way of driv-

ing. She liked the bubbling of her mind, darting first to one thing, then to another, then back to the first as if she had never broken away from it.

It was dusk when they reached the house on Roxmore Drive in Beverly Hills and drove under the porte cochère —a big white Spanish house set far back from the street, and framed with spreading palm trees. The lawn under the fading light seemed a soft, thick dark rug. Pale petals of wistaria dropped on Carol's shoulders as she stepped out of the car.

"This is Boles, Doris," Margaret said when a stocky, middle-aged man came hurrying out of a door to get the bags. "Boles, this is Miss Gregg."

Carol noticed his shock of graying hair, the sturdy features, the small too-closely set eyes. Boles, she decided, she didn't like. She wouldn't have liked him if she had met him away from the Oliver house, if she knew nothing about him or the Olivers.

Neither did she like his wife, Nora, to whom she was introduced immediately, for Nora had followed Boles to the door. Nora was taller than her husband, with an angular spare plainness both in her face and her figure. Her hair, however, was not gray, it was jet-black and drawn plainly about her face, wound into a knot at the back of her head. Her eyes were black, too, and large, and above them were shaggy, heavy brows that dominated her face.

She and Boles took the bags, and Margaret showed Carol the house. "I want you to write Helen about it,"

she said. "Helen's never seen it. I've tried to write her about it, tell her where everything is, but I don't succeed in giving her the picture I want of it."

They had entered the library, and the room was a pleasant one. A man's room, really. Comfortable tan-leather lounging chairs, a roomy couch, walls paneled in dark wood, plenty of ash stands, a permanent bridge table and four chairs set by the window.

Nothing in the room looked particularly new or old, but everything seemed used a good deal. On one of the chairs was a knitting bag with two white bone needles showing and the ends of some pale pink yarn. Margaret's, Carol thought. It was Margaret's. She claimed it immediately, and showed the dress she was making to Carol.

The living room was more formal, an immense room with a two-story ceiling. The fireplace was not the cozy-corner fireplace of the library. It was a great baronial fireplace, with high, hand-wrought andirons in front of it. The three four-foot logs it contained fitted nicely.

Neither was the furniture the comfortable furniture of the library. The couches here were stiff, the chairs stiff, some of them great high-backed, hand-tooled leather chairs.

The dining room, too, was formal like the living room. A massive Jacobean table and chairs and buffet and servers, a hand-made Spanish rug on the floor, and red

damask draperies at the windows. The table, however, was not set for dinner.

"You're going with us tonight," Margaret said when they passed from the dining room into the hall and started up the winding stone staircase to the second floor. "We're going to a dinner party at the Murrays, and I've told them you're coming. We're dressing, and we have to be there at eight."

"But, really, I've a headache. I don't feel like going. Would you mind terribly, if I didn't? If I went right to bed? The train—the trip over the desert—" Carol had rehearsed this speech, too, on her way into the Santa Fe station. She was letter-perfect in it, but she thought it came from her lips falsely.

Margaret was sympathetic at once. Of course she didn't mind. Doris could stay home if she wished. Nora would bring up a tray; she could have exactly what she wanted for dinner—bread and milk, if she liked. Margaret would even give up the dinner party, if Doris wanted company.

Carol persuaded her she didn't, that she would be all right, that she thought the headache had only come from fatigue. In the end, Margaret was satisfied to go, and Carol, who was getting over the strangeness of being called Doris, was feeling a little thrill of exultation at the successful way Paul's plans were turning out.

CHAPTER THREE

Carol was put to bed promptly and her tray came, Nora bearing it, at seven-thirty. A delicious semi-invalid tray, exquisite in its appointments of Minton china and sterling silver. Soft-boiled eggs, buttered toast, custard and coffee.

Margaret, in a green-lace dress that made her look like a little girl trying to dress up, came in with Larry at quarter of eight to say good night. Carol liked the way she held Larry's hand when they came up to the bed, liked the way she looked up into Larry's eyes and smiled at him, the same intimate smile she had seen before when Margaret had introduced her husband.

She liked the slurred way Margaret pronounced his name, too, as if she loved to say it, as if it meant a good deal to her to say it. She watched Margaret brush a bit of dust from his dinner jacket, and straighten his tie, and she knew from the way she did it that she loved doing for Larry. Loved doing anything.

Carol knew, too, from what Paul had told her, that these two had been married three years, and yet, when she saw them together, she had the feeling that there was the same intense excitement in them that there had been when they first met and discovered they loved.

Margaret, when Larry was with her, was a quiet Mar-

garet, much of the effervescence of the trip from the station gone. She was a watchful Margaret, a Margaret who was watching Larry, who was loving him, a woman who was content to sit quietly and feel the waves of her love wash over her.

Margaret, with Larry present, was more like the Margaret of the picture Paul had showed Carol. Her eyes took on a depth that might be sadness, but which Carol thought might be deeper happiness, too. And her lips drooped more.

Carol hadn't seen Nick yet. He was out, Margaret said, but Doris would probably meet him at breakfast. He was going to meet them at the Murrays' after dinner, because he had a previous engagement.

They left after a few minutes and Carol listened to them going down the stairs, listened to the car starting under her window, heard it pull away. Nora came up at eight and took the tray away. She didn't have much to say while she was in the room, except to ask if there was anything more Miss Gregg wanted. There wasn't. After she left, the girl lay for a while waiting for the beating of her heart to calm a little, and for a bit more courage to come. She had sprung at the chance of doing something for Paul Devlin, because she loved him, and now that she was ready, that everything was perfect for her to do his job, she was afraid. She admitted it, as she sat up in bed and looked at the door.

The house was so strange, even if she had been in every room of it with Margaret Oliver. She was alone

in this strange house with Boles and Nora, neither of whom she liked. That they were on the first floor and she on the second made no difference.

She still felt they were near, and Nora had left the room so quietly, closed her door so quietly. It was almost as if she had vanished when the door was closed, for Carol hadn't heard a footstep.

Margaret and Larry she had heard going down stairs, but not Nora. What if Nora were out in the hall—waiting?

"I can't, Paul," she whispered. "I tell you, I can't!"

But she had to. She had promised Paul. He would expect her to do what she had promised to do for him, now that she had the opportunity. She couldn't disappoint him.

Nora had opened her window, but Carol, out of bed with her dark silk robe around her shoulders, and soft slippers on her feet, closed it and started slowly for the door. The room, this room which she had been in such a short time, a few hours, seemed so safe.

"I can't—" she whispered, when her hand was on the knob of the door. But she turned the knob. It turned noiselessly and the door opened, and she was looking up and down the corridor. No one was in sight, and a dim light was burning on a table in the hall. It cast a great black shadow on the wall.

Carol knew where she had to go. She already had looked into Nick's room with Margaret as a guide. It was the big room at the back, running the width of the

house, much the same as the room Margaret and Larry occupied at the front.

She could see the door from where she stood. It was partly open, as was the door to the Larry Olivers' room. So was the door to the room across from hers—another guest room. And it looked as if there were a dim light burning in Nick's room.

She left her own door and tiptoed to his. There was a light on the desk. Her fingers quivered as she put them against the wood paneling of the door and opened it wide.

The room was unoccupied, but, to make doubly sure, she went to the bathroom door and looked in. Then she opened the closet door which grumbled as she turned the knob, and found that empty. The blinds were drawn.

Everything here was all right.

Telephone numbers, names, addresses—these were the things Paul wanted in Nick's room. Nothing was unimportant, if it had been written down.

Slowly she went forward to the desk. The top held nothing but a box about a foot square on the big desk blotter, a hand phone, an ink stand and pen, a small rolling blotter and the desk lamp.

The box was of red lacquer, and the keyhole of dull brass glittered under the light. Carol tried the lid of the box first. It opened easily and it contained some papers clipped together. They were gas bills, light bills, water

bills receipted, but the girl looked them over carefully, before she put them back.

Neither were the drawers of the desk locked. The top-center one contained some stationery and envelopes, scissors, a tube of paste, a box of rubber bands, some gummed labels. Nothing else. The upper-right one held a box of poker chips and some playing cards still wrapped in fresh cellophane.

The bottom-right drawer was empty, except for a few stray paper clips. The top-left drawer was filled with cigarette packages, neatly arranged in rows. Carol took them out one by one—they were all unopened—and looked over the wrappings but could see nothing that was of interest to her. There was nothing below them, either, not even a scrap of paper.

The bottom-left drawer was absolutely empty.

So this was the desk from which Paul had hoped to find out so much. She sat in Nick's chair staring at it for some time. Never in her business experience of three years had she seen such a desk. The desks she was used to were bulging desks, untidy desks, drawers in desks that collected the most amazing things in the course of a year.

Mr. Smithton's desk, for example, had a faculty of mixing business papers with fishing tackle and pictures of his children, and forgotten clippings, aspirin tablets, a bottle of bromo seltzer, canceled stamps.

Here in Nick Oliver's desk—was nothing. Nothing that meant anything, anyway. Not even a memo pad

on top as Paul had led her to expect, and which she had thought must be there near the telephone. In a little rack at the side of the desk, though, she found telephone books, the Los Angeles directories, both local and suburban.

She looked through those, near the front where there was a page for telephone numbers. Nick had written nothing on that page, and there were no marks in the books she could see as she skipped through them quickly. Nothing. A dead loss, this trip to Nick's room, this search through his desk.

Next, she went to the night table by his bed. On this table was a lamp, unlighted, a cigarette tray, an opened package of cigarettes, a book of matches, unused, and a little note book. She took this to the desk and looked through it, but although some of the pages had been torn out near the front, there was not one scrap of writing in it. Every page a blank.

The two drawers in the little cabinet were empty except for the green paper that lined them.

She took the chiffonier next. On the top were two small boxes. The first revealed collar buttons, the second studs and odds and ends of more collar buttons. Besides the boxes there were two silver-backed brushes initialed "N. O.," a comb edged in silver, a whisk broom with a silver handle, and a plain amber shoe horn.

The drawers she went over inch by inch, all of them. She took out Nick's socks and put them back just as they were, his collars, his shirts, his underwear, every-

thing in the drawer. She even looked under the gray moire pads that lined each drawer and found—nothing.

Then she went back to the desk and sat down until she could get up more courage to go into Nick's closets and through his suits of clothes, his pockets, as Paul wanted her to do.

She looked at the picture standing at the back of the desk and in front of her eyes for a long time. It was almost on a level with her eyes, but her mind was a jumble of fear, and the contents of Nick's chest, and the useless search of the desk and the searing thought that after all her trouble she would find nothing and Paul would be disappointed in her. Above everything, she didn't want him to be disappointed in her.

She must have been sitting there a few minutes before the jumble left her mind, and she found herself recognizing the blond girl of the photograph.

At first, she couldn't believe it, and she closed her eyes for a moment, then opened them again quickly to see if the face was still the same. It was. And it was Jessica Reynolds' face, and it was the same picture which two weeks ago Jessica had given Paul, and which was now on his desk at the office. The picture for which Carol had been sent out to buy a frame.

While she was staring at it, absorbed in it, absorbed in the wonderment of finding Jessica here, she didn't hear footsteps coming along the hall.

Indeed, Nick Oliver was wearing rubber soles and

heels on his shoes, so he didn't hear his own footsteps as he walked over the carpet.

Carol only knew there was someone besides herself in that room, when she heard a masculine voice say,

"Well?"

The voice was behind her near the door.

At first, her mind was a wild panic, and she thought that her heart would burst in her chest. The panic lasted only a second, however. Somewhere back of the panic came a warning that told her to keep her head. The warning dashed away some of the panic—not all of it, but enough so that she could turn and say in a shaky voice:

"Oh, you frightened me—you must be Nick—I'm Doris Gregg—"

The frantic, quick pumping of her heart changed into a slow pumping; she thought Nick must hear it where he stood. A slow heavy pumping that made it hard for her to breathe, to even see him at the other end of the room.

"Yes," he said, as he came forward, looking at her, a frown deepening on his forehead. "I'm Nick." He took a chair, put it near hers and sat down.

"I—I was going to use your phone. Hope you don't mind."

She tried to smile and be light and gay, but the lightness and gayness she wanted to get into her voice wouldn't come. Her words fell flatly. She could hear

them, but they were almost as if some other person were speaking.

He didn't say anything, but he was looking at her and the frown was leaving his forehead—not the furrows, though. They were permanent. Now a smile was coming on his face, not a welcoming smile, however.

"I didn't feel well enough to go with Margaret and Larry, so they put me to bed. But I couldn't sleep—" How lucky she had been—just sitting at the desk when he came in! How lucky she was, not foraging through his clothes in the chest, or searching through the drawers of his desk! She could get by with the explanation of the telephone—perhaps—but how could she have explained taking out his underwear piece by piece, unrolling his socks one by one?

She felt a hot rush of blood tingling through her face, her hands, and the slow pump, pump, pump of her heart quickened again.

Back of her Jessica's picture, and staring at her, Nick Oliver.

"Margaret said you were going to meet them at the party—" She had to talk. Talking kept away the panic. "She said you were coming after dinner."

Her hand slid into the pocket of the tailored robe she was wearing. It was the right pocket, and her fingers touched Devlin's bunch of skeleton keys, tightened around them, gave her a little comfort because she had to grip something, anything.

"I came home to dress," Nick Oliver said, touching

the left cuff of his coat. Carol saw the watch there, too, saw the thin gold hands pointing to quarter of ten, and the keys bit into the palms of her hands. Eight-thirty when she had left her room across the hall! Had she been in Nick's room an hour and a quarter?

"Sorry," and she struggled to her feet. "I'll go, if you want to dress."

"No, go ahead with your call. My dressing can wait, if I dress at all. Have a notion not to go, after all. Phone book is in this rack, if you want it." He reached over and got the book and put it on the desk.

"I know the number, thanks."

Carol sat down again and reached for the phone with her left hand. Her right hand she took reluctantly from the comfort of the keys. If Nick expected her to phone, phone she must. So she dialed a number slowly, knowing that Nick was watching every move she made with her fingers.

It was a number she made up, but which she repeated silently to herself when she finished. She didn't expect to connect with it, because it was faked.

She expected the voice of the operator to tell her she had the wrong number, and she had her story ready for that, both for the operator and for Nick. That she must have copied the number incorrectly in her address book.

But no operator cut in, and she heard distinctly one ring after another. Nick must have heard them, too, for they seemed to bellow through the quiet room. Any

moment she expected to hear a voice in her ear, but she didn't and, after a time, she put down the phone.

"Not home, I guess," she murmured, rising. "Well, it doesn't matter. I can try again tomorrow."

"Friend from New York?"

"Friend of a friend from New York. I promised I'd phone her. And now I mustn't keep you any longer—"

"Sit down, Doris. Don't mind if I call you Doris, do you? And I'm not going to the party, so I don't have to dress." He lighted a cigarette, taking puffs of it hungrily.

Carol sat down again, although she didn't want to. What she wanted more than anything else in the world at that moment, even more than she wanted to see Paul, was to get out of the room, away from Nick. It seemed like a strange bad dream that she should be in the house, in this room with Nick.

But it wasn't a dream. It was actual, it was real. Her left arm rested on the arm of his desk chair, her right hand was touching the bunch of skeleton keys in her pocket. She was looking at Nick, watching the smoke curl up from his cigarette, forcing her lips to smile.

She could have reached out her hand and touched him if she wanted to. Their knees were very close, and the lamp was making an intimate pool of light about them.

All the time, too, she was conscious of Jessica, back of her fright of Nick and the fright of being with him.

Even though it was only her picture, she had the same feeling she had when she went into Paul's office. That three of them were present. In Paul's private office, she and Paul and Jessica. Here, with Nick, she and Nick and Jessica.

While she sat answering Nick's questions, how was her trip, how did she like Los Angeles, what would she like to do while she was here, she seemed to have two separate identities. The social one, which demanded that reply to Nick and was prompting her answers, and another which was appraising him while she was replying.

She, Carol Mayo, sitting talking to a man who was suspected by the Treasury Department of being the leader of a ring of counterfeiters.

A man who directed the making of fake ten and twenty-dollar bills—bills so cleverly conceived that many of them were never discovered, and never would be discovered. A man who was so careful about his operations that there was nothing yet to connect him with this gigantic forgery of national money.

With all Devlin's astuteness, he had not been able to trace one of the bills to the house on Roxmore Drive. Yet the bills continued to get into circulation. In the past few weeks, fifty thousand dollars worth of them had passed through race tracks and gambling houses throughout the country.

Nick's hands were hands that never were still. Carol found her eyes attracted to them more and more as she

sat with him. They were the hands an artist might have, she decided. The fingers long and tapering, the nails well-kept, the flesh tanned as was the flesh on his face, the wrists slender.

His body might be still—it was still, not even a muscle on his face appeared to move when he was not talking—but his hands were restless, and in their restlessness they seemed detached from his body. It was uncanny to see his body so quiet, his hands so active.

The left one held his cigarette, on which ashes formed constantly and which he flicked on the floor as fast as they formed, the right one moved here, there, brushing some fancied dust from his coat, fiddling with a match box, twirling a knife he had taken from his pocket, all this without any movement of his shoulders.

In the same way that Margaret's picture was not exactly like her—had perhaps only caught a mood of a moment, so Nick's, which Carol had studied on the ride to the train, was not like him, either.

His actual face, as she saw it now, was not so hard or set as that of the photograph. And the charm did not show in the photograph. For Nick had charm, and a good deal of charm. She felt it was the kind of charm that could be turned on and off at will.

At first, when he had found her in his room, it had definitely been turned off. Now, the last few minutes, he had turned it on.

Why there had been that change in his attitude she

didn't know, but it was encouraging. It made her feel less afraid, a little more sure of herself.

It finally gave her courage to get up and say that she must go to bed, that she was very tired, and the added courage of shaking Nick's hand when he walked to the door with her. She couldn't have done that at first, she couldn't have touched him without giving herself away.

In her own room, with the door locked, she didn't go to sleep. She huddled in one of the big chairs, a blanket over her knees because it was chilly, going over every incident of her adventure in Nick's room—that room where a man had lived for over two years and yet which held nothing personal except his clothes, his cigarettes—and that photograph of Mrs. Reynolds.

None of the little traps a man collects with two years' residence in a house. No personal notes—it might have been a hotel room where Nick Oliver was spending a week or a month.

She heard Larry and Margaret come in quietly about one-thirty—for she checked the time on her watch when the car went into the garage. They made hardly any noise as they came upstairs, and in a little while the house was dead once more.

"It's all right," she kept saying to herself until she finally fell asleep in the chair, more from nervous fatigue than from physical fatigue. "Everything is all right. I know it is—"

CHAPTER FOUR

Nick was not present the following morning at breakfast, but Margaret and Larry Oliver and Carol had breakfast together in the dining room, with Nora serving them. Margaret was full of the party of the night before. She was dressed for the day—she and her sister's friend were to go out for a long ride to see the city and what it had to offer.

In her navy-blue jersey dress with the prim white-piqué Peter Pan collar, she was no longer the little girl trying to dress up, but a little school teacher frightened of her first class.

In the strong morning sunlight, the house was not so somber as it had been last night. The dining room was gay with flowers, talisman roses on the table. "From my garden," Margaret said proudly. On the buffet a bouquet of stock and delphinium. Also from Margaret's garden. In the hall a low bowl of pansies on a console table.

The living room did not look so formal nor so stiff with the sun pouring through the open Venetian blinds.

The garden at the back of the house, surrounded by white stucco walls over which red rambler roses crawled, was a profusion of flowers. "My garden," Margaret explained lovingly when she showed it to Carol after

breakfast. The way she said it, the girl knew Margaret loved every flower in the garden, and had planted them all herself.

She thought of her mother as Margaret led her around the garden, explaining this flower, telling her the name of that.

Mrs. Mayo had the same love for flowers, and the same grimy fingers that Margaret Oliver must have had to make nature bloom in such abundance. Mrs. Mayo in Santa Ana never went out in her garden without finding a weed that was doing some harm to one of her blooms—even if she only went on a tour of inspection.

Margaret was the same way. While she was showing Carol around, she kept stooping and picking up little weeds until her hands were full of them when they came back to the terrace, and she emptied them into a little basket.

"It's the first I've ever had," she said shyly, as she held open the door. "Except, of course, for window boxes. Larry and I have had window boxes every place we've lived, even in New York when we first were married. My first window box was a couple of pots of geraniums. Helen will tell you about them. She used to laugh at me."

Carol thought again of her mother—and the trip she and her mother had made to Chicago when she was fifteen, where they were to stay a week in a hotel. Mrs. Mayo's first purchase, an hour after they reached the

hotel—a pot of cineraria because she couldn't bear to be in a room without a living, growing plant.

It was fairly easy to reconcile Nick and Larry with the counterfeiting ring—but Margaret. Margaret didn't belong. There must be something wrong in Paul's reasoning.

They walked upstairs and Carol went into her room to get her hat and bag. She had to open the large wardrobe case to get the hat. She had the hat in her hand and was about to close the case when she noticed that some pumps which she had put into small knit shoe cases were without the cases.

Definitely she remembered that when she packed, she had slipped the two extra pairs of shoes she was taking, both of them, into knit cases. One pair lavender, the other a dull rose.

The dull rose cases still contained each a shoe, but the lavender cases were empty lying on the floor of the shoe compartment and the pair of brown shoes that had filled them were quite naked.

And she hadn't had them out. She had done very little unpacking last night and none this morning. Her underwear in the dresser drawer and her little leather case which contained her cosmetics in the bathroom—but she hadn't touched the shoes.

The print dress she was wearing this morning was different from the one she had worn on the train, but the oxfords she had on were the same blue kid oxfords.

The only shoes she had taken from the wardrobe case

were her soft-soled bedroom slippers—the only pair of bedroom slippers she had brought.

The brown shoes were not new, but there was a reason for taking them instead of the newer brown ones which were now at home in her apartment closet; they had no Los Angeles store label on their sole lining. Paul's orders had been to see that nothing with her could be identified in any way.

Had he anticipated that her things would be searched?

From the shoes, Carol went through the rack of clothes in the top compartment of the case. One glance told her she never had put her dresses away in the fashion she found them. They were on their hangers, yes, but they were not folded neatly as she had folded them, then pinned together so they would stay on the hangers. The pins were gone.

"Ready?" Margaret called from the hall.

"Just a minute—" Carol was glad the door was closed. She shut the case as quickly as she could and went into the bathroom where her toilet box was lying on a shelf. It was where she had left it, and did not seem to be touched. She couldn't tell.

At any rate the bottles and the jars in it looked to her as they had looked that morning before breakfast when she had last used them. The cover on the rouge box was not snapped down, but then sometimes she didn't snap it tightly. She might have left it that way this morning.

Her purse—she didn't know whether that had been

searched, either. Everything was in it, except the bunch of skeleton keys.

She had fastened those to her slip this morning so she wouldn't have to leave them in her room. The ticket—a round-trip ticket Paul had given her, cancelled all the way from New York to Los Angeles, but which she had used only from Pasadena. The name Doris Gregg signed to it. An identification card with the name Doris Gregg signed to it, too. Fifty dollars in bills. Paul had put those in. The compact, the lipstick, the fake address book, a pencil, and fountain pen, three handkerchiefs, which were new—she had had to buy new handkerchiefs for her character as Doris Gregg because her own were initialed.

The small dressing case held nothing now but a few magazines, books, and a little sewing kit. She had taken her robe and bedroom slippers and the few other pieces of underwear from it last night before she undressed. And she couldn't remember just how the two books and the three magazines had been left, whether the books were on top of the magazines, or the magazines on top of the books.

Margaret opened the door and poked her head in as Carol was closing the bag.

"Whatever are you doing?"

"Looking for something. I guess I didn't bring it." She got up from the floor immediately and followed Margaret from the room, but she had time to glance

at Nick's door before she started down the stairs. It was closed.

Who had gone through her things? Nick? He hadn't been down to breakfast. Neither had she seen Boles this morning. Nora had been about, though.

Larry she had seen at breakfast, but he hadn't come out into the garden with her and his wife. He had gone into the library as soon as they had finished—at least, he had said he was going there. . . .

Not Margaret, because she had been with Margaret since she had come out of her room—Margaret had come and called her for breakfast. Besides, it must have been a man. A woman would have remembered to pin back the dresses on the hangers, and put the shoes back in their cases. A woman would have folded the dresses neatly.

The red feather on Margaret's blue-felt Tyrolean hat bobbed up and down in front of Carol as they went down the stairs. Margaret was walking gayly, but Carol's feet were dragging, and the same panic was coming over her that had come last night when Nick surprised her.

Back of the panic was the same warning voice, but it was weaker than it had been before, not so sharp and commanding. At the bottom of the stairs, she was quite breathless.

Margaret didn't notice, however, as she led the way through the hall and to the library—for the family used the library entrance to get to the driveway.

Larry was reading the morning paper, his feet propped up on the desk. His wife kissed him as she passed.

The car was just outside the door, but there was a man in the driver's seat. Nick, leaning back smoking, one of his nervous hands fussing with the steering wheel.

"Why, Nick!" Margaret exclaimed. "You going with us? I thought you said—"

"I think I'll save you the trouble of taking Miss Gregg out today, Margaret, if she doesn't mind me for a guide. Do you, Doris?"

"Oh, no—" Carol managed to say, the roof of her mouth dry, and her lips quivering.

"Margaret can have you later." He started the motor, and motioned the girl to get into the front seat with him. The door was open.

She looked at Margaret, and saw the surprise on her face, and then the surprise change to something that might or might not be fear, then this harden into a smile.

"Nick's a good guide, Doris. He won't let you miss a thing."

When Carol was in the car, Nick backed it out immediately. She waved to Margaret, and Margaret waved back, but there was a stiffness about her raised hand, her gloved fingers that frightened Carol, and sent the panic surging through her anew.

Nick drove expertly, too, Carol noticed. He handled the big car as if it were a toy, but, like Margaret, he

drove carefully, observing every traffic signal, stopping in plenty of time for every light, keeping to his own lane. And he kept up a running conversation as he drove.

"You are now in the city of Beverly Hills, Doris, and this street we are coming to is Wilshire Boulevard where it joins Santa Monica. However, we'll take Wilshire, because you'll probably want to write back home and tell your friends that you saw the University of California which is a branch of the University of California at Berkeley. Observe the wide streets and when we get to the top of the hill you can see the University buildings—"

Carol, who had been out on Wilshire Boulevard hundreds of times, obediently looked and obediently murmured something—she didn't know what. She was glad that Nick was talking—she couldn't have stood silence from him—now. But she didn't like the way he was talking.

She tried to tell herself that she was imagining the sarcastic undertone to the chatter about streets they were passing, things he was showing her. She tried to tell herself that he was treating her as he would any girl from out of town he might be guiding through Los Angeles. That this was his way.

Then she had to admit that she didn't know his way —she didn't know anything about him, except what Paul Devlin had told her.

"And here is the Soldiers' Home. This is Sawtelle.

See the veterans of the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, and the World War walking about? I wasn't quite old enough to go to war, or I might be here, too."

He laughed, and the laugh definitely had an edge to it. She didn't like his laugh, anyway. Last night she hadn't liked it. Today, she liked it less. It sent shivers down her back.

If only she knew! If only she knew that Nick didn't suspect her! That he had accepted her story last night, that he hadn't searched through her things this morning—

It was the uncertainty that was so maddening—and his voice, which one minute seemed to laugh at her and the next was so perfectly serious.

She looked at his profile—she couldn't see his full face—there was a little smile around his mouth, but that had been there last night, too, some of the time.

And Margaret's surprise. She hadn't expected to see Nick in the car. She had expected to take her guest sight-seeing herself. But how quickly Margaret had fallen in with Nick's plans. Not a murmur.

Whatever Nick was, a counterfeiter, a respectable citizen, he at least was boss of the house he maintained. His word was law. He didn't even have to give excuses or reasons for his decisions.

All this and a whirl of other things were going through Carol's mind as they drove along. One part of her mind was listening to him, one part was wondering

where they were going, another was trying to decide still whether Nick was acting.

"The great Santa Monica," he went on, when they reached the beach. "Some people apparently think it's warm enough to go swimming today. For myself, I should say it was too cold. May in Los Angeles is still too chilly for swimming. I prefer to wait until July. By the way, did you make your phone call this morning?"

This was the first time he left his chatter about the sights. Carol stiffened.

"No, I didn't."

"We can stop at this drug store if you wish, and you can put your call in here. Probably the last stop we'll have for some time."

"No, thanks."

What did he mean—the last stop they would have for some time? Carol looked back at the drug store, saw it disappear as the car went around a curve and into the beach highway. Should she have asked Nick to stop, and then when she was in the booth—there would be a booth—call Paul and tell him she was afraid? Too late now. . . .

Nick stopped talking, and his silence, as Carol had anticipated, was worse than his conversation. She sat uncomfortable, while they sped over the smooth new road, feeling every nerve in her body in the tips of her fingers.

Nick was driving much faster, fifty miles an hour, fifty-five, for there was little traffic on the road. She

tried to think of something to say that would relieve her tension, start him talking again, but she couldn't think of anything.

Now and then, she looked at him surreptitiously. The smile was gone from his mouth and his chin was lower than it had been. It seemed squarer, more determined to the girl.

They passed Los Flores canyon with its neat little restaurant on the beach. There were a few people lunching on the porch, and the sight of their safety, the gay color of their beach clothes sent another fright through Carol.

There was so little ahead, the Malibu movie colony and the store, then another ten miles without even a gas station and only a few scattered homes.

Always before she had loved this road that hugged the beach so closely, part of the Ringe estate which formerly had been guarded by armed riders, and was free of advertising signs for so long. But now, with Nick beside her, she realized how lonely it was.

At noon, the traffic was not heavy. A few cars passed them going north, and a few coming south, but for the most part they had the road to themselves.

Always before, too, she had been fascinated at the water that was so close and the clean bright sand, and the houses, so few, so isolated, and the mountains that sloped to the road.

This morning, she didn't look at the water, nor the sand, nor the cliffs with their bits of green moss and

sand flowers clinging to the rocks. She looked at the road ahead, at Nick's profile, and at the speedometer. It read seventy miles an hour now, but Nick still was handling the car superbly.

They whizzed past the garage and service station which was the half-way point on the Malibu road—at seventy-two miles an hour.

Carol's teeth were biting into her lips and her right hand was clutching the smooth broadcloth upholstery of the seat, her fingers deep into the raised welt that bound the edge.

The roar of a motorcycle charged past them, and a wild joy came over her—for a moment. Only for a moment, however, because in that moment she thought the motorcycle was a State vehicle, driven by a traffic officer.

It must be! It wasn't though, and it whizzed by them, a white delivery car with a gnome-like man on its seat dressed in brown, a white cap on his head, and great goggles over his eyes.

The big car took its speed gracefully. There was not much vibration to the powerful sixteen-cylinder motor —and yet the girl's eyes kept coming back to the speedometer. It crawled from seventy-two to seventy-five, and then slipped back to sixty to fifty-five to forty to thirty.

Nick put his hand on the gear and threw it into neutral, his foot on the brake, and the car stopped, suddenly. Carol felt her body move forward with a jerk.

The road ahead was deserted, not a house. The road back was deserted. Not a house, either. No cars coming.

Nick took his hands off the wheel and lighted a cigarette, taking his light from the lighter attached to the wheel.

"Thought you might like to look at the water from here. Nice view," he said easily.

She obediently did look out at the water, through the window his shoulder was almost blocking. He wasn't looking at the water, she knew, although she didn't glance at his face. She knew he was looking at her.

"Who are you, anyway?" he asked suddenly, after another terrific silence.

"What—what do you mean?" she faltered.

"You know what I mean, Miss Whoever You Are. You know you're not Doris Gregg, and I know you're not Doris Gregg."

"But I am—"

"I don't know what you were looking for in my room last night, nor why you presumed on our good nature to lie yourself into our house, nor who sent you to us. Nor do I care. Get out!"

Carol stared at him, her lips open. All the sarcastic, good nature was gone from his face. It was twisted into a snarl.

"I said get out!"

He reached across her to the door latch and pushed it. The door swung open.

Perhaps Carol got out on her own feet; perhaps the sudden opening of the door threw her out on the shoulder of the road; perhaps Nick helped her. She never knew. But she found herself beside the car, standing on her feet and she heard the door slam and the hum of the starter as Nick pressed his foot on it.

"In case you're worried about your baggage, I'll have it taken to the express office. You can pick it up there."

Those were the last words Nick spoke to her. The car he turned neatly around with one twist of the wheel. In a minute, it was headed back for town.

Carol got a ride as far as Santa Monica with two women who were traveling from San Francisco to Los Angeles—after an hour of waiting by the road and hailing each car as it came. In Santa Monica, she called Paul Devlin, who told her he'd come and get her.

There was none of the fierce impatience in his voice that she expected, not a word of blame for her when she told him what had happened. Indeed, his voice was pleasant. It was still pleasant when he hailed her at the corner of Wilshire Boulevard and Ocean Drive, three-quarters of an hour later.

"I'm so sorry," she said when she got into the seat beside him. "I've done everything wrong. I've spoiled everything for you—months of work, months of planning. I shouldn't have undertaken the job. I should have known I couldn't do it."

Yesterday, the job, this impersonation of Doris Gregg had seemed so easy, so fascinating. Frightened, yes, but

frightening in a way that was glorious. For Paul. He had asked her to do it. She would do it, do it right, the way he wanted her to—

But she hadn't; she had done it all wrong. Paul instead of admiring her for the successful completion of his plans—how she had hoped to find something he wanted in Nick's room!—was criticizing her for her failure. To himself, of course, for he hadn't said anything to her yet. Hadn't scolded her as she expected.

And now everything was lost—all she had hoped for, Paul's esteem which would take her out of the class of his secretary who was Miss Mayo and into the class of his friendship—and partnership. It was this partnership, this friendship she wanted so much. The first thing he had ever asked her to do outside of her regular office work—and she had failed him.

If it had been anyone but Paul, it wouldn't have mattered. She could have said, "I did my best, and I'm sorry, that's all." But Paul—

"I'm sorry," she said again, hopelessly. Everything was so black, so dull, her mind, her thoughts, even the day which was unusually bright for the beach.

"Will you please stop saying you're sorry, Miss Mayo? It really isn't necessary. I understand perfectly what happened. Nick Oliver found you in his room last night, and suspected you immediately, even if you were only sitting at the desk by the phone. It means something to me that he suspected you. It means more to me than if he hadn't.

"It means something, too, that he took the precaution to go through your clothes. If Nick were not guilty, he wouldn't have suspected you and he wouldn't have gone through your belongings. I'm certain that he was the one."

Then it wasn't hopeless, such a failure! She had done something for Paul that he appreciated. And wasn't she riding with him now, beside him—as she had done yesterday on the way to Pasadena? The ride, of course, meant nothing to him, but the ride and his proximity meant a good deal to her—so much that when she thought of it now, now that Devlin had taken some of the disappointment away, tears filled her eyes.

She wanted to move closer to him, so that her arm would touch his. So that her body would feel his. Instead, she moved closer to her door, farther away from him, and looking out the window, brushed away the tears surreptitiously.

"Besides, Miss Mayo, it was a chance. Everything more or less in my line of business is a chance. You take it and hope you'll succeed, but more often than not you don't. Often when you fail you really win, and that's the way I feel today—that we've made progress."

The "we" did more for Carol than anything else. It warmed her heart, it made little waves of contentment pass over her until the waves tingled in her fingers, in her toes. It brought her into partnership with Paul. It made her forget the formal "Miss Mayo."

"Yes, Mr. Devlin," she said when she got hold of her-

self again. She hated to call him that. She always longed to call him Paul. Jessica Reynolds did—when she and Paul were together. To Carol Mayo when she was asking for Paul on the telephone, she said, Mr. Devlin, and Mr. Devlin when she came into the office to call for him. Carol envied her that intimacy.

"Can you remember everything you saw in the drawers of Nick's dresser and his desk?" Paul asked.

She could. It was almost as if she were going through Nick Oliver's things for the second time as she listed everything to Paul, from his shirts to his handkerchiefs, to his socks. As she spoke, she closed her eyes and saw before her again the chest of drawers, opening each drawer in turn in her mind, then in the same way the desk with its dim light burning, the telephone, the clean blotter on top. And the little night table by the bed with the cigarettes in the top drawer.

"No notes, no addresses?" Paul demanded.

"I'm sure I didn't miss anything. I was in the room a long time, over an hour. I didn't go into the closet and through his clothes, though. I didn't have time for that."

"And you looked through the telephone book?"

"I glanced through it hurriedly. There were no numbers written in the front."

"I should say, Miss Mayo, that you've made a thorough operative. You haven't missed anything. I know how many shirts Nick has, how many handkerchiefs—but—"

"But nothing else!" And the flat feeling of failure came over her again and the bright day faded into a dark one.

There was the picture of Jessica she had seen on the desk. Carol hadn't said anything about that yet, but it was because she didn't know how to. The sight of the photograph on the desk in Nick's bedroom had shocked her, and she was feeling the same shock at having to tell Paul. If it had been anyone else but Jessica Reynolds, but it wasn't.

It was Mrs. Reynolds—and the photograph was the same one Mrs. Reynolds had given to Paul two weeks ago.

Paul, an employe of the Treasury Department of Investigation, and Nick Oliver a suspected counterfeiter, each with a photograph of Jessica. Paul's in his office. Nick's in his bedroom.

"What was that you said?"

Carol didn't realize she had spoken, but she must have.

"Nothing," she returned hastily. In a way, she was glad of the picture in Nick's room—glad it was Jessica. There was triumph in that.

After the first frightening shock in Nick's room had come the feeling of triumph. Jessica so sure of herself, Jessica so sure of Paul—for she was sure of him.

Carol knew enough about the psychology of her own sex to know that. The way Jessica asked for Paul on the phone, the way she greeted him when she came to the office. The little innuendo that Carol always felt in

her voice, which only another woman feels, "He's mine if I want him, but I don't know whether I do. I'll see."

Jessica never had voiced those words, but they came to Carol anyway, just as if Jessica had spoken them.

Paul would be hurt, terribly hurt at the news of the picture on Nick's wall—that is, if he really loved Jessica, or even if he cared for her—and, in a way, the hurt he would feel would take away some of the triumph of the telling.

"There is something more, something that puzzled me—" she began, and then hesitated.

"Yes, Miss Mayo," Paul prompted, and the speed of his car changed perceptibly.

"Nick has Mrs. Reynolds' photograph on his desk—the same one you have in your office. I recognized it at once—"

Carol had turned and was watching his face closely. It didn't change as she expected it to. Instead, a smile touched his mouth.

"I expected it would be somewhere around—that picture—because Nick took it, out at the polo matches one afternoon. A Leica camera, and the shot was so good he had it enlarged. The picture wasn't made at a regular photographer's as you'd expect it was. I persuaded Mrs. Reynolds to give me one of the prints—quite the best I've ever seen of her."

"Oh," was all Carol said for a moment. Her one find

in Nick's room didn't mean anything. Paul already knew about the picture.

"Then Nick knows Mrs. Reynolds?"

"Yes, Miss Mayo. Nick knows Mrs. Reynolds. And Mrs. Reynolds, who doesn't know anything about my being a T-man, thinks Nick is a fine fellow. Nick, I suspect, is in love with Mrs. Reynolds, as a good many of us are—"

"As a good many of us are—" Carol repeated the words many times as the car went along. "As a good many of us are." That meant Paul, too, didn't it? Certainly, it must. . . .

The black failure of her day became deeper and deeper.

CHAPTER FIVE

The following day, her adventure with the Olivers seemed very far away to Carol—one of those things, although it was the biggest thing that had ever happened to her, so trivial that she could erase it almost completely from her mind—so trivial to her happiness.

Jessica Reynolds was foremost in her thoughts again.

Mrs. Reynolds was in the office with Paul, and she had been with him for fifteen minutes. Carol was watching the clock on her desk. Now and then she could hear them laughing, and then their silence, and then the low rumble of Paul's voice. She couldn't distinguish a word, but that didn't matter. She didn't have to. It was enough that they were together.

Fred Taggart, Paul's assistant, came in, looked at Devlin's door inquiringly and then at Carol.

"Mrs. Reynolds is with Mr. Devlin," the girl said shortly.

So Taggart sat at his own desk in the reception room. When Paul had no callers, and there was only Carol in the outer office, he always went into Paul's office. When anyone was with Paul, or someone was in the reception room, he used his own desk.

He was a big man, younger by a few years than Devlin, and with his brief case when he left the office

he looked like a hustling, college-bred bond salesman, which was in part true. For he had been a halfback at Williams College, also Paul's college, and he had been a bond salesman for a year before he had joined up with Paul, who had been his idol when he was a freshman and Devlin a senior.

He was twenty-eight, lonely, and for several months he had been thinking a good deal about Carol Mayo, not seriously, but thinking all the same. For all of a month, he had called her Carol and she had called him Fred, which was as it should be—to him.

When he thought of her, he thought of cool quiet streams, and deep fragrant woods, and the scent of old-fashioned gardens after the sun has gone down. He didn't know exactly why the quiet streams and the deep woods and the old-fashioned gardens were associated with Carol, but they were. Certainly there was nothing in the stuffy office, in the scarred desk which was Carol's, in her general efficiency around the office to suggest such rural delights, which Fred loved very much.

Perhaps it was her voice that made him think of the streams. He liked her voice—it was gentle, and yet firm and, sometimes, it seemed like a song to him, especially over the phone when he was calling in, and he had been disappointed or was dead tired. Her voice always buoyed him up.

When he analyzed her as he sometimes did by himself, eating alone, or driving alone, or reading in his room, analyzed her face, he had to tell himself that her

features were not the regular, carefully chiseled features that real beauties had.

Her nose was too short, indecently small, her mouth was too large, her cheeks too broad, and her forehead a little too low. Taken separately her features, each of them, had something the matter with them, even her eyes, which were lovely and brown but like her mouth, too big for her small face.

The features of Jessica Reynolds, on the other hand, were perfect, the nose exactly right—a sculptor might have cut it in marble—her mouth, her lips just right, her soft cheeks just right, as they came down to make a heart of her face.

But of the two girls, Fred preferred Carol. He liked the vivacity in her face, the way it lighted up so suddenly, the quick way her lips had of laughing and her eyes catching the laughter until they sparkled.

The way the laughter lingered about her, spreading around the whole room. Jessica Reynolds didn't have that quality of vivacity, of laughter in her and about her. Not that she didn't laugh, she did. But her laughter was not spontaneous like Carol's.

Fred Taggart usually thought of Jessica's face as a mask—and there was nothing mask-like about Carol's face. He was used to it—he had watched it so much. He could read it when he had the chance.

He had the chance now, for Carol was looking at Paul's door. Fred thought she looked worried, and a little unhappy, and he didn't like her to look worried

or unhappy. He liked her to be a gay Carol. Worried perhaps about that ordeal of hers yesterday . . .

Fred had begged Paul not to send the girl—when Paul told him Miss Mayo had consented to go. Nothing really had happened to Carol in her adventure, but something might have happened. Fred's eyebrows almost met over the bridge of his nose. He didn't want anything to happen to Carol.

"Did Mr. Devlin tell you I saw Mrs. Reynolds' picture on Nick Oliver's desk?" the girl asked suddenly, turning to Taggart.

"Yes, but Paul knew he had one. He told you, didn't he, that Nick took that picture?"

"Yes, he told me."

Jessica had now been in Paul's office exactly half an hour. It was eleven o'clock, and she had come in at ten-thirty. That was unusually long for one of Mrs. Reynolds' visits, for she had the habit of running in but only for a few minutes. Never half an hour alone with Paul.

"She's really very lovely, don't you think?" Carol wanted Fred to say that Jessica was ugly, hideous, awful. But he didn't. He didn't say anything. He simply nodded his head in agreement, and the girl was disappointed.

She looked down at the navy-blue crêpe dress she was wearing. When she put it on this morning it seemed very appropriate, very business-like with the simple, organdie vest and the fresh organdie tucked cuffs.

After Jessica's pale-lavender sport dress, her deeper purple plain felt hat, her gloves to match her hat, the navy-blue dress seemed terrible to Carol. Jessica looking like a flower, like a fragrant hyacinth, and she—well, she looked like any girl who worked in an office, for a living—any nice, sensible, working girl, who had to wear dark clothes to save cleaning bills.

"Just when did he meet her?"

"Nick meet Mrs. Reynolds?"

That wasn't what Carol meant at all, she meant where had Paul met Jessica, but she didn't correct Taggart. She let it go.

"Don't know exactly. Mrs. Reynolds told Paul that they met a couple of years ago on a party in San Francisco, found out they both lived in Los Angeles, and have been seeing each other occasionally ever since. Now and then, they play tennis together.

"Nick plays a nice game of tennis and so does Mrs. Reynolds. She beat me several times, and I'm not so bad. And she beat Paul once, but that was when Paul was careless or he let her beat him, I don't know. She's a clever woman, you know. Dabbles in painting, too."

Carol knew that. Now and then when Jessica called and Paul wasn't in, she would say she was "at the school" and to have Paul phone her there. The school was the Derrick School of Art on Tenth Avenue and Minor Street. Jessica went there every Tuesday and every Friday from nine in the morning until noon.

There was no doubt that Jessica was clever, with her

fine game of tennis and her interest in modern art, and her humanitarian work in the Mexican quarter. Two evenings a week she gave to that and one afternoon.

Even Paul had said she was clever. "A clever woman, Mrs. Reynolds," he had remarked once after Jessica had gone, with only Carol there to hear what he was saying. Here was Fred saying the same thing. Probably that's what Nick said, too, and all of Mrs. Reynolds' friends.

Paul had admitted, too, that he was one of the many men who were in love with Mrs. Reynolds. Carol couldn't forget that. She hadn't forgotten it for one moment since he had told her.

And Jessica?

But Paul couldn't have meant what he said! He couldn't! He was only talking. That had been the answer to all of Carol's arguments since yesterday.

The door of Paul's private office opened and he and Mrs. Reynolds came out. They passed Carol and Fred, Jessica smiling at the girl and hailing Fred gayly and went on out into the hall, for Paul was taking Mrs. Reynolds to the elevator.

Fred got up after the door closed and went into Paul's office, closing the door there after him. In a few minutes Paul returned and instead of walking by Carol's desk, came up to it.

"Doing anything on your noon hour, Miss Mayo?"

She said she wasn't.

"I wonder, then, if you'd do something for me. I have to pick out an engagement ring for a lady, and

I'm—rather lost at things like that. She insists I do it myself, won't help me. Would you—would you go with me, so I won't be hopelessly wrong?"

Something happened to Carol's throat. It seemed to close, she could feel it closing tight, and her heart was pumping as it had been when Nick had surprised her in his bedroom.

Devlin apparently didn't notice her distress. He went on: "I'm really a dud at buying things for a woman—never have had any sense, always get something wrong. But this ring has to be right."

Carol found her voice, finally, and miraculously the pressure at her throat ceased. "An engagement ring for a lady?" she asked slowly.

"Yes. Mrs. Reynolds and I are going to be married."

"Oh—"

He was looking down at her smiling, and she was looking up at him, trying to smile.

"Oh—of course, Mr. Devlin—"

"Thanks. I knew you would."

She waited until she was alone, until the door of his office was closed and then she put her head down on her arms.

"For this lady, sir?"

"No, not for this lady," Devlin explained to the clerk in the jewelry store, "for another lady."

Carol tried to enter into the humor of the situation. Paul was smiling and so was the clerk. So she smiled,

and the mirror in front of her told her she made a good job of it.

"What size?"

Paul turned to the girl. "What size would you say?"

"I should say that her hands are about the same as mine," she said coolly, wishing the end of the world would come. She thought she had minded terribly buying the frame for Jessica's picture, but her minding that, her fury at that, was nothing to the dull despair at choosing an engagement ring for Jessica. If she were alone doing the choosing, she could give vent to her feelings, but she wasn't alone. Paul was standing beside her looking worried again and slightly embarrassed.

"First time I've ever asked a woman to marry me," he had said, as he and Carol walked into the jewelry store. "First time I ever went to buy an engagement ring. I wish Jessica were here. I don't know why she wouldn't come, except that she said the ring must be my own choosing."

The clerk brought a tray of rings.

"You look them over and see what's there," Devlin said.

"But you don't buy engagement rings like you do yardage, Mr. Devlin," Carol protested.

"Well, I'm trusting your judgment. Once in Washington, I sent a corsage of roses to a woman friend, and she said she cried for an hour because the roses were red and her dress was pink. And, besides, she wanted gar-

denias. That was my last attempt at picking out anything for a woman. Since then, I've always had help."

Carol went about it seriously—there was nothing else to do. She slipped one ring after another on the third finger of her left hand—some she let stay longer than others, speculatively. All of them went on snugly and comfortably.

There was a time three years ago, when she was nineteen, that she had worn a diamond on the same finger—a diamond which she thought some time might fit above another ring, a wedding ring. She had worn it for three months, the first month proudly, the next month doubtfully, and the third even more doubtfully.

At the end of the third month she had returned it thankfully and it had been accepted reluctantly. She had agreed with her mother, when it was off her hand, that she was too young to think yet of marriage, and that she had been blinded by a school girl romance—and the diamond.

She didn't see the boy again, and she promptly forgot him, so thoroughly that as the rings slipped on and off her finger she remembered him for the first time in many months.

What would her mother think now—that she was twenty-two? That she still was too young for marriage? Carol felt old and very bitter, and her past little romances so trivial, so sophomoric, so fleeting—and there had been a good many of them since she had worn Bob's diamond and planned her hope chest and

started to hemstitch little lunch cloths and tiny tea napkins.

Those romances seemed so unreal, and this love of hers for Paul Devlin so terribly real, and so terribly cruel. More cruel today than it had ever been before.

"A beautiful ring," the clerk murmured, as he handed her another. She put it on. It was a beautiful ring, and it looked magnificent on her hand—it was made for her hand. One big white diamond and little stars of smaller diamonds circling around the big stone.

Carol thought it was the loveliest ring she ever had seen. If she were choosing a ring for herself, this was the one she would have . . . but she wasn't choosing one for herself.

"That would be my choice," the clerk urged.

"What about it, Miss Mayo? I like the looks of it. Do you think she would like it?" This from Paul.

"I'm sure she would." Carol's voice was very low as she answered, her eyes on the big center stone.

"Then I'll take that—now a wedding ring to match. Might as well pick that out, too."

"But you won't be wanting to get the wedding ring yet—will you?"

The girl didn't dare to raise her eyes to his—so she kept looking at the ring. Trying on the engagement ring had almost been too much for her—if she had to try on Jessica's wedding ring, too—

She did, in the next few moments, for the clerk brought another tray of platinum bands set with dia-

monds. First, she had to put on a wedding ring, then slip on the engagement ring—see how they looked together.

Half a dozen wedding rings went on her finger, the first time in her life a wedding ring had been there, and while they were there she was thinking that a wedding ring would be nothing new to Jessica. She already had one, the one her first husband must have put on her finger very proudly when they were married.

Paul would put his on her finger very proudly too, when they were married . . . and the other ring, the first ring, would come off.

Carol was familiar with Jessica's present wedding ring, for Mrs. Reynolds never was without it—a platinum band set with sapphires. It was the only ring she wore.

"Well, that's over," Paul sighed with relief as he took out his checkbook and made out a check for twelve hundred dollars for the two rings.

The girl watched him as he wrote. She liked his handwriting, and his firm, clear signature, the quick way he penned his name, and yet every letter legible.

One of the first things she had admired about him, in the days when she considered him just a boss and nothing else, was his handwriting. The "Paul Devlin" at the end of his letters was so satisfyingly conclusive.

"I don't know how to thank you, Miss Mayo. I seem to be getting into positions lately where I always have to thank you and don't know how—" He said when

they were going out of the store and the two rings, each in a separate box, were in his pocket.

"Now if you can spare a little more time, would you come into this florist shop with me and pick out some flowers for Mrs. Reynolds? I think I should send flowers, too, don't you?"

Was this going to keep up forever and ever? Was she going to have to pick out everything that Jessica got from Paul—up to the wedding and even after they were married—if she stayed on as Devlin's secretary?

"Why, yes, I think I could spare more time," she said evenly. Even if he was buying gifts for Mrs. Reynolds, she was with him, wasn't she? That was some compensation, walking at his side, standing near him, feeling his nearness. Not much, but a little, better than being by herself in the office thinking about him, wondering what he was doing, wishing she could be with him.

In the florist shop, she chose a great bunch of yellow roses, and besides that a corsage of gardenias, picking out each gardenia herself from the refrigerator, because Paul was taking Mrs. Reynolds out to dinner this evening and wanted something besides the engagement ring to make it a special occasion.

"That's all, I guess," he said when they were out of the shop and on the sidewalk. "And thanks again."

"Mr. Devlin, did you tell Mrs. Reynolds about—" Carol had been wanting to ask this question ever since Paul had announced he was going to marry Jessica.

"About—what you really do—and the Treasury Department?"

"I told her this morning when she was in the office, Miss Mayo—before I asked her to marry me," he replied gravely. "After all, if she was going to marry me she had to know what I really was doing." He glanced up and down the street, then turned back to Carol. "You haven't had any lunch and neither have I. Suppose we go and have a bite? I see a restaurant down the block."

A surge of triumph came over Carol as she entered the restaurant with him—that she should be lunching with him today when he had also proposed to Jessica Reynolds and been accepted! It didn't matter whether he talked of Jessica through the whole meal, or kept silent during the whole meal—she would be with him—eating with him, for the first time.

As a matter of fact, although Carol was glowing with happiness, the meal and the three-quarters of an hour they spent together at the table were prosaic. Never once did Paul speak of Jessica, indeed he didn't have much to say about anything, for he was hungry.

At times, Carol thought of the two rings in his pocket, one which would pledge him and Mrs. Reynolds together for life until death, and that spoiled the glow for a little, but not for long. The glow lasted even after they separated outside the restaurant, and she went down the street by herself—and Paul took the opposite direction.

She was past the drug store on the corner, her foot off

the curb of the sidewalk starting to cross the street when she remembered that the box of matches on Paul's desk was empty, and there was no reserve supply in the office.

Because she saw to those little things, too, she stepped back and went into the drug store. She had bought the matches at the cigar counter, and was putting the change in her purse when the door to the phone booth next to the counter opened suddenly, and she found herself looking up into Nick Oliver's eyes.

CHAPTER SIX

Nick Oliver was about to pass Carol, she was sure of that, when he stopped abruptly, and spoke.

"Well! This is a surprise. Never thought I'd see you again after yesterday, and here I run into you today. Amazing, isn't it, the coincidences in this world of ours? Get your baggage?"

Carol nodded. The glow she had been feeling was gone, as if a light had been shut off. The same sickly feeling of fear came over her that Nick's presence had brought before—the two times she had seen him, first in his bedroom, then in the car outside the Oliver library.

"Yes, I got it, thank you," she told him.

Paul had seen to getting her things; she had had nothing to do with it. When she had returned home from the office, her bags were with the landlady.

"Everything as you wanted it?"

"Everything, Mr. Oliver."

"You might tell me your name, you know. It happens I don't know it."

There couldn't be any harm in his knowing her name, could there? She had had no instructions from Paul about what to do, if she ever saw Nick again. Paul probably had presumed she never would.

"My name is Carol Mayo."

"Properly introduced at last, Miss Mayo, although why you should try to get into my house under false pretenses I don't know. What I should have done was to have turned you over to the police—but you were too pretty for that."

Their eyes met, and Carol drew hers away first. If he were guilty, as Paul thought he was, he must be thinking the same thing that she was—that he hadn't dared turn her over to the police. If he were innocent and never in his life had had anything to do with counterfeiting, then he was speaking the truth; and pity for her had kept him from having her arrested.

"Had lunch?"

"Yes, I have—"

"Sorry. I was going to ask you to join me."

Then Carol was sorry she had given her name so promptly—any other might have done if she had considered. Mary Smith, or Jenny Brown—any name but her own. He could find her if he wanted to, her phone number and her apartment house address, because her phone was listed in her own name.

All he had to do was to look up the "M's", which would be simple, even for a schoolboy. A private phone was one thing her father and mother insisted on her having, for they liked to call her at least once a week and see how she was getting on. Her father paid for the phone. He also paid ten dollars monthly on Carol's rent, so that she could live in a better apartment than her salary warranted.

"Coming?" Nick inquired, for the girl had been silent at his last words. "I'll walk down the street a bit with you."

There was no way of getting out of that, either—at least no way that Carol could see. They went out of the store together, crossed the street, and at the entrance to the Dickson Building in the next block, she paused. "This is where I stop." It wasn't where she stopped—she still had two blocks to go to the Mortimer Building where Devlin's office was and where she was past due.

Nick tipped his hat courteously. "See you again some time, I hope. We really should get better acquainted, Miss Mayo. There are lots of things I'd like to ask you."

She went into the building as if she had every right in the world to go there, and he went down the street slowly at first as if nothing were hurrying him, then, when he was a few yards away, faster. When he was in the middle of the block, his pace was the pace of a man who was very late for an appointment.

When he was at the end of the block, Carol came out of the Dickson Building cautiously and stood in the entrance for a while. She didn't see Nick, but by that time he had turned the corner, and was going north.

His plan was to circle the block and get back to the Day Drug Store as quickly as possible, and his plan was completed in five minutes, which was record time, for the crowds on the sidewalks were heavy.

The Day Drug Store was where he had encountered

Carol. It was dangerous, he knew, going back there, but this was no time to think of danger nor to wait and give orders to someone else to go there.

What had the girl been doing in the store, anyway? She had bought something at the cigar counter, yes, but what it was he didn't know, although he had studied her small brown paper bag minutely, both in the store when he was talking to her, and on the street when he was walking with her. Damn Carol Mayo! And Devlin and the whole mess of them!

Nick controlled his facial muscles very well as he entered the store, but he was seething underneath with a furious anger that made his blood feel like fire in his veins. His face was flushed—but this was the only outward sign that anything was wrong.

The same clerk at the desk, of course. He couldn't expect anything else, and she might recognize him, because he had spoken to the girl. And worse luck—his phone booth was occupied. His phone booth meant the one he had been using before he ran into Carol Mayo.

There was another booth beside it which was empty——the store had only two, but Oliver made no move to go into that one. He took notice, however, of the man who was in the booth he had vacated. A brown suit, he could only see the shoulders of the coat, a gray hat tilted on the back of his head. His hair, what Nick could see of it, gray and thin. Nick didn't recognize the brown shoulders nor the gray hat, nor the thinning gray hair.

Of course, there was the chance that the girl had only come into the store to make some small purchase at the cigar counter, the chance that her presence in the store was accidental, but Nick was one who couldn't take that chance. He couldn't afford a slip-up, and it would be three o'clock before Rod Alden came to the store, and went into that first phone booth. It was two-thirty now, by the big clock at the back of the store.

He went up to the candy counter which was across from the cigar counter in the center aisle of the store and pointed out to the clerk the box of candy he wanted. While he chose the candy, however, his thoughts were on the phone booth. The man was taking infernally long with his call. Nick hoped he roasted in the hot booth. He almost had, in the one minute and a half he had been inside.

The clerk, a pretty girl, wrapped up his candy, and took his five-dollar bill. The man in the brown suit still was talking, but Nick had a smile on his face now, although it was pale. The healthy brown tan had turned to yellow. The flush had gone.

To people who knew him, his yellowish pallor was more deadly than his flush. It meant that his anger had cooled and pure hate had taken its place. Nick's hate was worse by far than his anger. His hate at that particular moment was turned both on the man in the booth and on Carol Mayo.

The five-dollar bill was changed and he was putting what was left of it in his pocket, when the man came

out wiping his forehead. Nick leisurely picked up his package and walked to the booth, closing the door after him. The package he placed in the shelf, and his right hand put a nickel into the slot of the phone in front of him.

His left hand was searching for something underneath the shelf, something which he had put there not long ago himself.

It was there, as he had left it—the slip of paper he had pasted under the shelf for Rod Alden to pick up at three o'clock—stuck to the under side of the shelf with two little bits of glued paper, the patented kind which need no moisture, only the heat of a warm hand.

His right hand was dialing while his left tore the paper away and crumpled it into a small ball. He didn't throw it on the floor, however, nor put it in his pocket. Instead, with the ball of paper held in his hand, still the same hand, he felt in his coat pocket for his lighter.

Then his right hand hung up the receiver and he stooped to the floor. In a second, the spark of the lighter flashed and the flame touched the thin paper and burned it rapidly. He waited until it was almost black cinder in his hands, then let it fall and stamped out the dying embers.

From his vest pocket he took a cigar, and lighted it with the lighter. This he did facing the window of the booth, and when he came out a blue trail of smoke followed him. He didn't forget his package, and he didn't linger in the store after that. He went directly down

the street and around the corner to where his car was parked in a garage, his face still yellowed and his eyes glowing.

In the garage he met a broker friend, who stood discussing the stock market rise with him for ten minutes. Nick continued to smoke the cigar, although he hated cigars, hated the feel of them in his mouth. Now and then in emergencies he did smoke them, but he always regretted it because they made him slightly sick at the stomach.

He listened conscientiously and intelligently to what the broker was saying, but his thoughts were neither on the market nor his friend. They were on the message that his man Alden wouldn't get now until tomorrow, which would interfere with Nick's plans because the message was intended for today.

The message concerned the time and plan for the pickup of certain sums which were due Oliver—always a different time and a different place each week. Certain good, sound Treasury bills which Nick liked to count, gloating as he counted. But he wouldn't get them today at the Paramount Theater at five as he had thought. He would get them tomorrow at another theater. . . .

Taylor, one of Paul Devlin's men, was watching the Oliver house on Roxmore Drive. He had been watching the house in the same way for several months, every night from seven o'clock until seven in the morning, twelve hours.

Ostensibly, he was a night watchman from the Harris Agency hired to guard Beverly Hills property, but in reality, although Devlin had arranged for him to wear the Harris uniform, he never went to the Harris office.

He reported to Devlin at Devlin's apartment every day, phoned from a booth in a drug store in Beverly Hills at seven-fifteen each morning, Sundays included.

Tonight, huddled down in some bushes in his usual vantage point which was across the street, he knew that the Olivers were all at home, and by the Olivers he meant the whole tribe, servants and all.

He knew them all pretty well by now because he was an acute fellow. Knew the difference in Nick's driving from Larry's, and in Boles' driving from the other two men, and in Margaret's driving.

He even knew the sound of their footsteps when they went to the garage—that is, if he were next door behind the hedge that separated the houses, another vantage point, but not a favorite one because the right-hand neighbors of the Olivers had a dog, which sometimes barked in his kennel at the slightest sound.

Nick, Larry, Margaret, Boles, and Nora, all inside. Lights in the library. He could see the yellow glow from them on the driveway, but he couldn't see the shadows of anyone in that room. Nor in any other room when it was dark, and the lights were on and the curtains pulled.

The shades, he had told Mr. Devlin more than once,

must be lined with steel or brick. You simply couldn't see through them at night—not even a shadow. It was the same in the kitchen.

Well, there was a light in the library, and in the bedroom at the back on the first floor which he knew was occupied by the Boles family, man and wife. That was all the lights on the first floor—not even a light in the hall, tonight.

Upstairs, there was a light in the bedroom that fronted the house, and another at the back, which he couldn't see from his vantage point but which he had ascertained some time before on one of his scouting trips.

Devlin said the front bedroom was used by the Larry Olivers and the back by Nick Oliver, but he didn't know. He had never been in the house. All of his work, except the preliminary work when he had had to get acquainted with the people he was to watch—not literally but figuratively—was done by night, and in the early morning when the household was not up.

Sometimes at midnight Nick went out, and sometimes as late as two in the morning. Sometimes he took a car, either the big sedan or one of two coupés. Not often, but once every couple of weeks. Then Taylor had to scurry.

There was another one of Devlin's men two blocks down the street with a car, and Taylor had to get word to him that something was stirring in the Oliver house. He didn't run down the two blocks, that would be a

give-away, but when he heard the garage doors open—they were pretty well oiled, but he could hear them at night even across the street—he would get out of his bushes or wherever he was and flash his flashlight against the trunk of a tree. The other man would pick up the signal and get ready by starting his car.

After that, Taylor had nothing more to do with the car or the person who drove the car. He had only to keep on watching and report as usual when he was off duty in the morning. Whether Devlin's other operative picked up the Oliver car or missed it was none of his business.

If Taylor had been able to go into the house, he would have found the library unoccupied even if it were lighted; the Boles' bedroom unoccupied, too, and in the bedroom of the Larry Olivers, only Margaret, who was trying to read in bed.

In Nick's bedroom, however, were four persons, the two Oliver brothers and Nora and Sam Boles. Nora was sitting in a chair knitting an afghan, working on one of the small orange, purple and green squares. In a bag at her feet on the rug were other completed small gay squares. There was little expression on her face as she knitted.

Boles was sitting in another chair twirling a big gold watch fob. He was frowning. Larry was walking the floor nervously, past Nora and Boles, flicking the ashes from his cigarette in the wastebasket by the desk every time he came to it.

Nick had turned his desk chair around, so that it and he were facing the room.

"Sit down, will you, Larry!" he exclaimed impatiently, and Larry sat down on the edge of the bed, although there were two more chairs he could have chosen.

"I told you," he muttered. "I told you a dozen times."

"I'm not interested in anything that you told me," Nick said coldly. "I simply wanted to give you the facts that I thought you should have. That girl came into the drug store while I was there leaving a message in the usual way.

"She may have wandered in, not knowing I was there. She may have followed me in. She didn't find anything in this house, I know that, but she's Devlin's secretary."

"You're sure of that?" Boles asked quickly in his high falsetto voice.

"I knew when I saw her in this room who she was. I'm familiar with Devlin's office force."

"You should have told us." Larry reached for the tray on Nick's night stand where he ground out his cigarette.

Nick said nothing to that but he looked at his brother coldly, and a red flush started on Larry's face.

"What do you think we ought to do, Nick?" Boles inquired, looking at his chief. When the Olivers entertained, Boles and Nora always called Nick, "Mr. Oliver." When they were alone, only the family, he and Nora were more familiar.

"Nothing—yet. But I'm not going to stand this interference much longer. Devlin with his Fred Taggart and now his Carol Mayo, and the others, too, that man out front watching every night, and that car that follows me every place I go. So far I've managed to give the car the slip—must burn Devlin up."

He smiled and the company, all but Larry, smiled with him. For a moment there was no sound in the room but Nora's needles clicking together, and the slight asthmatic wheeze that Boles had when he breathed.

"We should be careful," Nora said calmly, looking down at her stitches and counting them while she spoke.

Nick nodded, satisfied. He liked Nora. She was the most valuable ally he had in the house, the coolest, much better than Boles, who was inclined at times to get rattled, much better than Larry, whom he realized now he never should have taken into this business with him. He would trust Nora above all the others together, the others here, he meant.

"This is all Margaret's fault," he looked sternly at Larry as he said this.

"I can't see that it is—we were all taken in," Larry returned. "It's no more her fault than it is your fault or my fault. She'd never seen Devlin's secretary. None of us had—but you. And we only learn that tonight."

Nora took the situation, which was getting strained, in her own hands.

"It's the first slip we've made, and I should say that the victory at the present moment goes to Devlin, much

as any of us hate to admit it. For my part, I'd like to wash the slate clean of Devlin and Taggart and this—girl. Carefully, of course, but thoroughly. A little accident?"

"It was agreed, Nora, when I came into this there was to be no violence. Isn't that so, Nick?"

"That's so." But his voice wasn't as convincingly eager as Larry wanted it to be. It was rather flat and the answer might have been an answer about the weather. "And that's all now. I simply wanted to warn you all to be careful, doubly careful, triply careful."

They all got up and left, Larry first. He hurried to the room he shared with Margaret. She looked at him searchingly as he entered, and when he came to the bed kissed him softly, but there were no words between them until Larry undressed and turned out the light. Then instead of getting in his own twin bed, he sat down on hers.

"Did you tell him?" Margaret whispered, taking his hand in the darkness. Her voice was tense.

"Not tonight. I didn't get a chance—"

"But, Larry, you promised! Larry, we've got to get out of this—I can't stand it any longer! If we could just go away—we won't ever breathe a word of any of this to anyone. I won't, you know that, and you won't. Nick will be perfectly safe—"

"Hush—not so loud—" for her whisper was rising.

"And we could be by ourselves, you and I. We've never had a decent life together since we've been mar-

ried. Nick always, what he wanted to do, never what we wanted to do. I'll scrub floors, anything—you know I don't want money. I'll tell him tomorrow, Larry, ask him—"

"No, no, you mustn't. You've got to leave everything to me. He doesn't trust you, you know—"

"He should know that as long as I have you, everything is all right! He should know—if he weren't so blind! And the girl, Larry? Did he find out who she is?"

"Devlin's secretary, worse luck. He knew when he saw her in his room. He recognized her—don't worry, darling, everything will be all right," for some of her tears were falling on his hand. "I'll find a time and place to tell him—I will!"

Taylor saw the lights in the library fade at midnight, and the light in the Boles' room shortly after. But it was two o'clock before Nick Oliver's room was dark. When he reported it to Devlin by phone in the morning, he said: "Nothing new tonight. Nobody came in, nobody went out. A quiet night."

CHAPTER SEVEN

Fred Taggart didn't know when he discovered that Carol was in love with Paul Devlin. Yesterday, he didn't know. He would have scoffed at anyone who suggested the possibility to him. This morning he didn't know it, either. At least, he didn't think he did. But sometime between one o'clock and four he had found out, and it was four now. The knowledge hadn't come swiftly as knowledge sometimes does, with a rush and surety that is so alarming.

This knowledge that Carol was in love with Devlin had come slowly. Fred didn't know what had given him the first clue to it. He tried to think back, but couldn't. Now that he knew, he realized, too, that she had been in love with Devlin for some time, weeks, maybe months, and that her love was a deep love, an enveloping love.

It glowed in her eyes, in her face, it sang in her voice. He watched it glow softly, for he was sitting at his desk in the reception room—someone was with Devlin in his office—there was a steady light about her as she sat reading a magazine because there was nothing to do.

He couldn't see the light, but he felt it was there, and Fred was not an imaginative person.

The knowledge that had come so slowly was disturb-

ing—and a little shocking, because with it came something else to Fred that he had not known before, either. And this was the knowledge that he loved Carol Mayo, and that he, too, had loved her for a long time.

It seemed, when he sat looking at her, that he must have loved her for years, even when he hadn't known her. An amazing thing that he should discover the same afternoon that Carol loved Paul, and that he, Fred Taggart, loved Carol, as he had loved no woman before.

The surprising thing about his newly discovered love was that it was not a rocking, emotional love. It was a quiet love, a settled love.

His unrest of the last month, with those disturbing thoughts of Carol, was gone. Quite gone. He was content to sit and know that he loved her. There wasn't much jealousy for Paul, not nearly as much as there should have been.

In the first place, Paul was his best friend, his idol. It was natural, proper that Carol should love him. He could wait, as he would have to wait for Carol, he could wait until she saw that her love for Paul was useless. It would be time, then, for him to tell her about his love.

Taggart wasn't impatient about waiting. He told himself that it didn't matter how long he had to wait. He would wait, that was all, and some day Carol might tell him that she loved him enough to marry him. Some day.

Carol was not thinking about Fred Taggart. She hardly knew when he was in the room. She was think-

ing about Paul, and between thoughts of him turning the pages of the magazine on her desk.

It was a bad magazine for her to have chosen, and she realized now that she shouldn't have bought it during her noon hour. A May woman's magazine, full of advertisements for June brides. Brides in long clinging virginal white veils, looking at flat silver, looking at improved Sleeprest mattresses, bath towels, sheets. A complete trousseau for five hundred dollars; the bride's breakfast; what are the duties of the maid of honor?

One of the brides in a colored advertisement was suspiciously like Jessica Reynolds. A blond girl with hair arranged like Jessica, and a long slim body like hers. If she covered up the face—and Carol did—the picture really would be Mrs. Reynolds. . . .

She closed the book impatiently, and glanced at Devlin's door. Jessica was not in there today—a stock, short man was, and he had been in there for an hour. However, Jessica had phoned this morning, and she and Paul were dining this evening.

Carol had ordered a corsage of camellias for dinner this evening—on her lunch hour. She had also, at Paul's request, bought four pairs of sheer chiffon hose for Mrs. Reynolds, the sheerest she could find at three ninety-five a pair. It seemed that Jessica had snagged a stocking last evening when she was out with Devlin. . . .

"I wish I had something to do!" she exclaimed.

Fred did, too. Because he knew, that when she didn't, she thought too much about Devlin. He knew she had

been thinking about him all the time she was turning the pages of her magazine.

"When do you think Mr. Devlin will be married?" she asked suddenly.

"Sure, I don't know, Carol. I asked him just that question last night and he said he didn't know. It's up to Mrs. Reynolds. Probably when he finishes with this case."

"Oh—" There was a little hope now for the girl. Paul might be a long time on the case. "And when will it be finished?"

"Never can tell. Any day, and then maybe not for months. Of course I don't know, but if I were in Paul's place I should wait until my work was done before I got married. I'd want a little honeymoon at least—and we always get vacations when we finish long-drawn-out cases."

Carol looked across at Fred sharply. He didn't speak and she didn't speak. Finally she got up and went over and sat on his desk. Her voice when she spoke was a whisper.

"Fred, is Jessica Reynolds all right?"

"What do you mean, all right?"

"I mean, I mean—it's hard to explain exactly what I do mean. But my finding that picture of her on Nick Oliver's desk. Of course I jumped to conclusions right away. I thought, well, you know what I thought. I thought that maybe she was mixed up

with Nick—in this case—" Her whisper was a hesitant one, but eager.

"You're all wrong, Carol. I know you are. Paul would know if there was anything between Nick and Jessica Reynolds. And you know Paul's going to marry her. Would he marry her if he thought for a moment that she was crooked? He's crazy about her, Carol. He told me so. He told me a couple of weeks ago that he was going to ask her to marry him—"

If Fred hadn't known that she was in love with Paul, he would have thought the sudden flicker of her eyelashes, the touch of a quiver on her lips meant nothing. But these did mean something. They meant that his words had hurt Carol, and he was sorry. But he had to hurt her some more.

"There's absolutely nothing to make us believe that Mrs. Reynolds is mixed up with Nick Oliver. Nothing. I suggested it to Paul myself, when we first learned—it was after Paul had met Mrs. Reynolds—that she was friendly with Nick.

"I know he investigated the theory privately, because he told me there was nothing to it. Nick had a good many women friends, Mrs. Reynolds is only one of them—and a very casual friend at the most. They play tennis together at times, they've dined together, but not often, and they meet at parties occasionally.

"But there are other women who do the same things with Oliver. Paul suspects that perhaps Nick is in love with Mrs. Reynolds, but then many men are in love

with her. Just why she should choose Paul out of these other men to marry, I don't know."

Carol caught the hint of disappointment in his voice, and took advantage of it quickly. "Then you don't really approve of Mrs. Reynolds, yourself?"

"I wouldn't say that, Carol. I have a good deal of admiration for Mrs. Reynolds, but I'm frank when I admit she wouldn't be the wife I'd pick out for Paul. Paul is going to go far as a T-man—he's young yet, and he's very clever. I think he needs a woman who will be more understanding than Mrs. Reynolds. No, not exactly that—"

"I know what you mean," she broke in, "someone less demanding. Someone who will settle down with him and give him the home he ought to have and the sympathy he ought to have. Mrs. Reynolds will want to be first, and Paul should be first. She's used to everything, getting everything, I mean."

"That's it, I guess, although I shouldn't be talking about her. She's going to be Paul's wife."

Carol wasn't through yet. She fingered some papers on the desk reflectively.

"Who was her first husband, Fred?"

"A chap named Corey Reynolds. He was killed in a railroad accident about four years ago, a year after their marriage. Older than Mrs. Reynolds. He was fifty-five when he died, and she was twenty-one, but he left her a nice income. There was a bit of trouble over the will because he had been married before—divorced his

first wife to marry Jessica. And his first wife and his daughter, who is only a year or so younger than Jessica, sued. They got half of the estate, but still there was plenty for Mrs. Reynolds."

"A California man?"

"No, Chicago. After the estate was settled, Jessica came on here to live."

"And met Nick Oliver—"

"I wish you'd forget that, Carol. There isn't anything to it."

"I could, if there had been another picture on Nick's bedroom desk and that other picture had been some other woman."

"Mrs. Reynolds' picture is the only picture of a woman in this office and there is another of her in Paul's apartment—and that is the only picture of a woman there."

So Paul had Jessica with him, too, in his apartment. Carol slid off the desk. The door to Paul's office opened and he accompanied the short, stocky man to the hall. When he turned back into the room once more, he said quietly, "I'd like to see you, Miss Mayo."

It was probable that he only wanted her to pick out something more for Mrs. Reynolds, Carol thought, as she took the chair Paul pointed to. More flowers, or perhaps some lingerie this time, or some books. Jessica was certainly getting more than her allowance of gifts.

Were most men like Paul Devlin and Mr. Smithton

about gifts for the women they loved? Men, she meant, who had secretaries to do their choosing.

Buying gifts for Mrs. Smithton hadn't bothered Carol at all. It had seemed perfectly natural to her to look at her calendar every morning, the calendar on which her predecessor had kindly indicated dates, say to Mr. Smithton, "This is your wedding anniversary, Mr. Smithton. I wondered what you wanted to do about it."

Or "this is Mrs. Smithton's birthday," or "this is St. Valentine's Day," or "Mother's Day is Sunday," or "did you plan to send your wife some flowers for Easter—they ought to be ordered this morning." So simple, because Mr. Smithton's surprise was so genuine, and he was so eager to fall in with her idea of a gift.

In the year and a half she had been with Mr. Smithton in the Ralph Winslow Company she had satisfied Mrs. Smithton completely. Now she was satisfying Jessica Reynolds, which she didn't relish.

She glanced at the picture of Jessica, but saw only the back of it from where she was sitting. Paul saw Mrs. Reynolds' face.

"Haven't heard from Nick Oliver, have you?" Paul asked suddenly after a moment's silence.

"No, Mr. Devlin."

"Seen him around any place since that day in the Day Drug Store?"

"No."

"Your apartment always all right when you go into it?"

"Why, yes—I don't understand what you mean?"

"Everything in place as you left it? You don't think your place is being searched?"

"No, everything seems to be as I leave it." Carol frowned as she thought back. "Do you mean that someone might enter my apartment and look through my things?"

"I don't know. I'm only asking you to check everything each morning before you come here, remember where you put everything, then when you go home at night, check again and see if things are as you left them. If they're not, I want to be called immediately—you have my private home number, and I can always be reached."

"But why should my place be searched? What would anyone expect to find?"

"I don't know, Miss Mayo. But you're in this now as much as I am. Just as deeply, and I've got to take the same precautions for your safety that I take for my own and for Taggart's.

"If I hadn't asked you to do that little job of impersonation for me, you wouldn't be in this predicament. But you are, and you must realize that you're in danger. I don't know how far this crowd will go, but I imagine plenty far, because their business is established and flourishing and they want to keep it that way.

"Nick Oliver thinks you probably know a lot more

than you really do. He's probably afraid. He probably hates you as much as he hates Taggart and me."

"But there are others, too. There must be. You must have other help besides Taggart, and the little help I gave you!"

"Of course I have, but I don't think he knows who my other operatives are. I hope not, anyway. Definitely he knows about me, and he knows you and Taggart. And he doesn't dare to stop his operations for a moment now. I've at least put him in that fix—which is exactly where I meant to put him when I sent you to his house to impersonate Doris Gregg."

She looked at him puzzled, groping for his meaning. He gave it to her immediately.

"Miss Mayo, I hoped he would recognize you. I had to show my hand. I had to do something that would put him on his guard, and I did. I sent you to his house. I deliberately lied to you when I said the girl operative I had chosen was ill. There is no other girl. I put on rather a good act for you, I think, because I didn't want you to know what was in my mind. Otherwise, you might have unconsciously revealed my plan.

"I used you entirely for my own purpose—that's why I didn't care that you found nothing in Nick's room. I'd been working in the dark for a long time, several months, and I decided the only thing to do was to come out in the open, and come out stupidly.

"I expected Nick to recognize you and he did. He sent you back to me as I thought he would, to let me

know he was on to my game. And something else that I expected has happened, something that had made me think I'm almost at the end of the trail.

"At the Kentucky Derby, day before yesterday, thirty thousand dollars in my favorite counterfeit bills passed through the mutuels. How much more bettors took home with them in their pockets unsuspectingly, I don't know, and I'll probably never find out. But the gang passed that money at Churchill because Nick didn't dare stop operations immediately. He had to pass it."

"But Nick is here and Churchill Downs is in Kentucky," Carol broke in.

"Nick is never where the money is being passed. He has never been seen at a race track—not even at Santa Anita here nor at Tanforan nor Bay Meadows up North. He leaves the horses strictly alone.

"Nick Oliver makes the money, Miss Mayo, or directs the making, tends to the distribution and probably directs where it is to be passed. How much money that thirty thousand dollars made for them at the Derby I don't know, either, but I can guess it was about even. Thirty thousand bad and thirty thousand good, because there were some long shots, maybe a little under or over. Safe bets, probably, with a couple of wild ones thrown on.

"We had forty men at the track watching the mutuel machines but no one was arrested. The money is so good that it has to be carefully examined by experts and

there is no time to do that in the rush at the betting windows."

"It seems so hopeless—" she sighed, "so awfully hopeless."

"Not at all," Devlin returned briskly. "It was hopeless six months ago when the money was slipping through gambling houses and race tracks, and we couldn't get a line on it.

"That was when it was hopeless, but a good lead took me here, one of those leads which you never think will turn out to be the right one. A gamble, and soon we'll have the gang, although I don't know yet where the money is made, nor how it is distributed. But I'm confident that it is made here in Los Angeles, and that it is sent from here or taken from here to where it is to be passed—and sent in great sums.

"If Nick weren't so slippery and so clever, I'd have had him before this. During prohibition he was just as slippery, because he ran rum in from Canada. We're sure he did, although we have no proof."

The telephone rang and Devlin reached for it himself. Carol knew from the way he spoke that it was Jessica calling, and her hands, folded on her lap, tightened.

While Devlin had been talking with her about Nick, about the amazing fact that thirty thousand dollars in counterfeit money had been passed only the day before yesterday in Kentucky, she had completely forgotten Jessica.

The conversation on the telephone brought her back to reality. It was as if she had been riding clouds, and then had fallen from them with a thud that landed her in the chair in which she was sitting as Devlin's secretary.

The conversation wasn't a long one, but it seemed very long to Carol. She found herself wishing it would end, fidgeting, trying not to look at Paul, trying to pretend she wasn't in the room, that she hadn't heard Paul say, "Oh, hello dear," and, "yes, dear."

When, finally, he finished and hung up, the relief Carol expected didn't come. The tight, lost feeling remained even after he started to speak again. Her hands hurt, she was clasping them so hard. But when she looked across the desk at him, her lips were parted in a set smile, and her face seemed eagerly attentive.

"How do you come down town in the mornings?"

"Street car or bus, Mr. Devlin."

"Well, hereafter, either Taggart or I will stop for you in the mornings and take you home at night. If you'll be outside your door at eight-thirty in the morning, one of us will drive by. And at night whoever is around will take you right home.

"And, Miss Mayo, I should feel that you were much safer if you had lunch every day with some one—one of the girls in the Winslow office will do.

"When I send you on errands hereafter, Taggart will go with you. I should prefer you to have dinner when

you are alone, in your apartment, and I'm going to ask you never to meet any of your escorts any place but in your apartment. Is that perfectly clear?"

"Perfectly—"

CHAPTER EIGHT

Mrs. Reynolds was business-like about her art school and her philanthropy. Her friends knew that after quarter of nine Tuesdays and Fridays it was useless to try to get her at home. And, as she didn't like to be called at the school, they usually had to wait, unless the call was an important one, for her to return home in the afternoon.

They marveled at her strict adherence to duty, and wished they had her stamina.

"Jessica is so faithful—you'd almost think it was a job she had!"

They didn't exactly understand what she was doing in art, for few of them were acquainted with the modernistic school. They looked at the bowls of fruit she painted, the milk bottle waiting on the back porch in the dawn, the strange, dying flowers lying on a mirrored table and politely said: "How nice. The effects you get are beautiful, Jessica!"

But they didn't understand the effects and they would have much preferred their friend Jessica to have been a painter of portraits. Then they could have given her a commission now and then, for many of them had young children they were eager to have painted in oils.

They were relieved that she didn't expect them to buy

her paintings, for they had no place for them in their proper, conventional homes.

Dutifully they went, however, whenever one of her pictures was exhibited, which was the least they could do, and made their polite remarks. When they visited Jessica's apartment, they exclaimed over the beauty of it, and they knew somehow that her paintings fitted on her own walls, but they knew, too, that her paintings would never fit on their walls, for her apartment was designed for her work—she had designed it herself.

Foster Derrick, himself, Jessica's teacher for two years, also admired her stamina. It was seldom that he found such perseverance in a woman who had means. Women of means dabbled usually, forgot their talent eventually, and then sighed because they didn't possibly have time to go on.

He admired, too, Jessica's generosity, for last year he had had few pupils and she had tided him over a bad financial spot personally.

But he doubted her talent, although he didn't tell her so, and he overpraised her when she did do something that he liked. At the present moment he had twenty pupils, more than he had had for two years, who had more talent than Mrs. Reynolds. Mrs. Reynolds made his twenty-first.

Sometimes, though, she did definitely do something good. The study of the milk bottle on the porch in the dawn. He liked that, because he could smell the cold

morning air and smell the dawn and feel it. He was preparing it at present for an eastern exhibit.

Both Tuesday and Friday mornings Mrs. Reynolds took an hour of private instruction from him, and then carried on alone with her own work. The room for private instruction was Derrick's own studio at the front of the suite of rooms on the second floor of a shallow little building called the Minor Building.

The room in which Jessica worked later with others of Derrick's pupils, who used his school as a studio, faced a wide alley which gave the room plenty of light.

Across the alley was a shabby, three-story brick flat building, also facing on Minor Street, uninteresting, dull as flat buildings can be when they crouch on the edge of the business district.

The whole neighborhood was shabby and dull, for Derrick had chosen his location on account of the cheapness of the rent. But his pupils never complained.

The school was an informal one, especially on Tuesdays and Fridays when there was no class, and the only students were those who took private instruction and carried on with their own painting.

After her lesson Friday morning, Jessica, a smock over her blue linen dress, went into the room on the alley side where her easel always stood at the window. It was covered today with a cloth as she had left it Tuesday, and before it was her own little table which held on it the composition for the painting she was doing at present.

The composition had been the same for two weeks, a detective magazine laid face-down on the bare deal table, near it a scarred black tin ash tray filled with perhaps a half dozen cigarette butts, and next to the ash tray a red apple with a bite taken from it. The apple, however, Jessica had put there only this morning, biting it carefully before she set it down. On her way to the school this morning she had gone to three fruit stands before she could find exactly the apple she needed, which must match the first apple she had chosen, even to the nib of the stem. The bite now had browned to the color she wanted, which was why she had put it there before she went in to her private lesson.

Only one other person was in the room, a girl of perhaps twenty with intense dark eyes, who was working quietly over an easel separated from Jessica's by about ten feet, near the window, too.

Anna Green had been with Derrick about six months —she was his most hopeful pupil. What Jessica didn't know was that she was getting her lessons for nothing and her use of the studio for nothing, also her paints and brushes.

They spoke, that is Mrs. Reynolds spoke when she came in, and Anna looked up with her big startled eyes, then back again immediately at her work. A faint smile touched Jessica's lips as she sat down.

She liked Fridays when only Anna was in the room, because for two hours Anna would sit like a mouse working, never once looking up, completely oblivious

to anyone in the room. Anna didn't even make any noise when she scraped her palette.

Sometimes, there were other people in the room—there were four easels. Derrick thought it was strange that Jessica did not rent a room for herself across the hall—there were several vacant, for her own studio. She would be near him just the same, he could run in and encourage her in her work.

But she didn't, even when he suggested it and showed her a room she could get reasonably.

Jessica's easel was placed so that by looking around she could see the alley and the flat building opposite.

Drab, horribly dull, her friends thought, for now and then one of them came to call for her at the studio when her work was done. Paul had called for her there and she had insisted on showing him her easel and her work and introducing him to Foster Derrick before they left.

Dull, horribly drab as her friends thought her view was, Jessica found it very interesting, although she didn't show her interest openly.

She could hardly wait until she sat down to look out the window—but when she did look out, it was to look leisurely after she had been seated for several minutes, her paints mixed and her brush in her hand.

Her first scrutiny was a careless one, a casual one. An on-looker would have thought she was simply thinking about her work, taking a moment's respite before she started.

First, her eyes went directly across the alley to the second floor of the flat which was called the Helena, although the name was almost weathered away from the sign on the entrance to the building on Minor Street.

On the window directly across from where she was sitting, on the second floor, was a little home-made railing of wood, and inside the railing a pink geranium in a pot. Often, while Jessica was painting, a woman would come and water the pot, and look across at the back studio of the art school.

Jessica was familiar with the flower and the woman who usually was in soiled red rayon pajamas, her hair done up in metal curlers. She even smiled and waved across to the woman at times, although neither of them knew who the other was. Jessica was always friendly with everybody.

From that window Mrs. Reynolds casually glanced at other windows and then at the window in which she was so vitally interested. This window was on the ground floor of the Helena, directly under the geranium pot. It was a window like the others in the building, the shades soiled and frayed, the curtains soiled and frayed. The shades were halfway up, and from the alley you could see that the furniture in the room was that of a bedroom.

Besides the bedroom, this particular flat in the Helena contained a living room, but the windows of this room were not visible to Jessica from the studio. Neither was the kitchen window.

After her quick scrutiny, Jessica went to work at her painting. Not until exactly eleven, when she had consulted her watch, did she look again. A square, yellow ice card was hanging from the shade pull. In heavy black pencil some words were written on the card under the printing. As Jessica had excellent eyes, she read the words easily, "Miller party 4 p. m."

Many times in the last two years, Jessica had gone down the stairs of the Minor Building out the alley entrance and across to the Helena flats, to flat Number 150.

Lately, however, she had not gone, but her messages came to her just the same—on the ice card, put up one minute before eleven on Tuesday and Friday mornings, taken down promptly at one minute after eleven. No one in the alley and no one in either building ever had seen the card but Jessica, and no one had seen the person, even the shadow of the person who put the sign on the shade pull. Jessica decided not to attend the wedding of the youngest Miller girl to the oldest Brickner boy at Grace Church. There was hardly any need of that, because the wedding was scheduled for four o'clock, and, besides, weddings bored her—big church weddings when she hardly knew the principals. But she would attend the reception, later.

She knew the elder Millers rather well, having entertained them several times in her own apartment with other people, and having been entertained in their home

half a dozen times. The bride she barely knew, and the bridegroom not at all.

She arrived at the garden reception at four-forty-five after the first rush of guests from the church, a beautiful Jessica dressed in a long pale-green lace dress and a wide leghorn hat. She was charmingly cordial to the Millers and their daughter and new son-in-law.

Guests who knew her thought they never had seen her looking so lovely. Guests who didn't know her asked who she was and wanted to be introduced.

That was the way with Jessica, that had always been the way even when Corey Reynolds was alive and she was his wife.

"You aren't really going to be married!" A man exclaimed when he came up to her. "I couldn't believe the announcement in the papers this morning—I've been trying to get you all day to find out."

"But I am—"

"It isn't right, Jessica. You know it isn't." The man had been in love with her himself for a year.

They talked together, and others came up and joined them, and all the time Jessica was chatting she was looking around, although the men and women around her didn't realize that her attention was divided.

She saw Nick come into the garden, but nothing about her betrayed the fact that she had seen him.

She went on with the story she was telling, a story about one of her Mexican protégés, without a break. No one in the little group knew that her pulse had

quickened, and those who noticed the slight flush creep over her face thought it was only the heat—because it was a warm afternoon. But then the flush made Jessica all the more beautiful.

Nick was going up to the reception line, shaking hands with Martin Miller and his wife, shaking hands now with the bride and now with the bridegroom. He had seen her, too, but no one in the gathering of two hundred and fifty people in the spacious gardens would have known it.

He wouldn't come to her at once, Jessica knew. It might be some time before they had a chance to get together—perhaps the chance wouldn't come. That had happened before. So she kept her group together—that was the best way, and she did it expertly, keeping them all interested, happy, but inwardly she was furiously angry.

Her anger was directed at everybody present, at those people immediately about her, at the Millers, even at the beautiful gardens which had been made more beautiful for the wedding than they had ever been before.

She was angry because she and Nick had to be apart, because they had to use this casual way to meet these days, these horrible round-about methods.

She would have liked nothing better than to have gone to him as soon as she saw him, run up to him, wildly enthusiastic because he had come at last and she was with him.

She would have liked nothing better than to have

taken him away from these people, from this garden so they could be by themselves, and they could talk as they did when they knew they were alone.

For two months he had not been able to phone her at her apartment, for they didn't know whether her line was tapped, like his, and he didn't want to phone her from a pay booth because that was dangerous, too. Everything was dangerous. He knew it as well as she did. Now and then, she could go at night to the Helena flat, but that was getting dangerous. She hadn't been there for two weeks.

It was only at these large gatherings where they could meet and see each other, sometimes get the opportunity for the words they needed to speak together. No letters, of course, they were dangerous, too. Nothing but these quickly snatched moments.

Nick Oliver wandered from the reception line to the buffet tables set under a white awning. Jessica maneuvered her group in the same direction, and in a little while she was holding out her hand and saying, "So nice to see you, Nick—"

Then he became one of the group as easily as if he had always been one of it. Jessica paid no more attention to him than she did the others, although her whole being was conscious that he was near her. But instead of satisfaction, his nearness brought back her anger and her unrest.

They ate and smiled and talked until, finally, Jessica said she must go, and the group said farewells and con-

gratulations again to the wedding party. Then Nick offered to pilot Mrs. Reynolds to her car and, before any of the other men could protest, they were walking away together slowly.

"Darling!" Nick exclaimed as he stopped to pick up his cigarette case which he had dropped deliberately.

"Darling!" she breathed happily.

"It's getting harder and harder for us—"

"I know, I know. Sometimes I think I can't stand it much longer."

They were on the sidewalk now and Jessica was glad her car was so far away—it gave them more time together.

"What about Paul? All right?" Nick asked.

"All right. Everything is all right. There's nothing to worry about. He's simply a big kid rather dazed at being in love. He handles beautifully. I didn't think when I got into this that I would have to go so far. Neither of us did."

The idea of Paul Devlin's ring on Jessica's left hand was not as shocking to Nick as it might have been. For although he loved Jessica as he never had loved another woman, still he was aware of the danger of their love—and his head was a steady and level one.

So was Jessica's. Together they were a good team. Together they had made a good deal of money, and together they intended to make a great deal more money—enough so that, in the end, they could be together always, and have nothing to fear.

Three years ago they had met and fallen in love. Nick was at loose ends, because he didn't know where to turn after prohibition had ruined his business. Jessica was at loose ends, too, because Corey Reynolds' fortune had been divided by the courts and she was spending her inheritance faster than she had intended to.

They always said they evolved the scheme of making money together, but in reality it was Nick's idea and Jessica had fallen in with it eagerly. She could see vast possibilities in it, and the idea, too, of the danger of it appealed to her.

She and Nick were clever. She would see that they didn't get caught. So she financed the business with the remains of Corey Reynolds' fortune at the start because Nick had no money—it was only right when she loved him so much. From the first, the venture had been a successful one, bad money pouring out, good money pouring in. Jessica it was who insisted the firm have social status and that she take the helm of that problem, for she liked too well to move in dignified circles to give them up, and she knew, too, the safety of those circles.

Nick it was who arranged the other details, the working details, getting the plates for the bills made, rounding up his dispensing crew, getting his organization together. Every detail of the organization work was discussed with Jessica, and she suggested the changes that seemed good to her. Nick appreciated her advice for it was sound.

Nick made the money himself with Jessica's help.

He didn't trust anyone else to make it. Lately, however, he had had to work entirely alone because it was too dangerous for Jessica to come to the Helena flats.

There had been a time, too, when Jessica had mailed out the money in bulky heavily wrapped shoe boxes, to operatives in the field, but that time was past. That, also, was too dangerous now for her—so Nick took that duty on himself.

It was at Jessica's suggestion that Larry and Margaret Oliver and the Boleses knew nothing of her activity in the firm. It seemed better, and it was better. So only Nick knew of her partnership, which was an equal one with his. Larry thought the money for the venture had been advanced by a friend in Panama, and that that friend was getting the cut that Jessica got.

"Paul is taking Carol Mayo home occasionally, he told me. Taggart sometimes, and sometimes Paul—guarding her." Jessica smiled up at Nick, as she gave him her hand when they got to the car.

Nick held the hand a moment longer than he should have.

"Could we arrange a little accident or something, Nick? I know we said there was to be nothing like that. Paul and Mayo together. Taggart is useless without Paul, and I don't like the way Mayo looks at me. Maybe not a fatal one, but something to get Paul out of the way for a while so I can breathe again."

"I've been thinking the same thing. In fact, I have

something planned. There isn't time to talk it over now."

"No, I know. But I trust you. You go ahead the way you think best. Just a road accident—it might happen to anyone—like the time that beast crowded me off the road."

"I had that in mind. Now, darling, I must go. I love you!"

Jessica got into the car, and started her motor. "I love you," she whispered, her head bent over the wheel.

CHAPTER NINE

More often than not, it was Fred Taggart who called for Carol in the mornings and took her home at night. She was always waiting hopefully in the entrance of the apartment house, looking down the street—for that was the way Paul came. Fred came up the street.

When it was Fred and she climbed in beside him, she was disappointed, and the morning which had begun so gloriously—for all her mornings began gloriously these days—faded into an ordinary morning like all the other mornings in her life.

When it was Paul who called for her—the few times he had—she was in a seventh heaven. She wanted to dance up to the car, but she didn't, of course.

She walked up to it soberly. "Good morning, Mr. Devlin," she said as calmly as she could, which was hard to do because her heart had a habit of leaping these mornings. She settled into the seat with Paul as decently as she could, then started to wish that the ride would take forever. The fact that Jessica had been sitting in the same seat the night before didn't even temper her happiness. Sometimes she even forgot that Paul was probably thinking of Jessica.

The heavenly ride to the office took twenty minutes and the ride home twenty-five because the traffic was

heavy at night. Both Paul and Fred drove carefully. They could have made the trip faster, but they didn't. Carol didn't want Paul to go any faster, although she never talked to him about it, but with Fred, she didn't care. He could go as fast as he liked and it wouldn't matter.

Fred didn't talk much when she was with him—but that was all right. She was always thinking of Paul with Fred, and she liked much better to think of him with no interruptions.

Paul had little to say, either. Sometimes the morning ride was made in silence, neither Carol nor he speaking, after their reserved greetings, for her "Good morning, Mr. Devlin," was always followed by his "'Morning, Miss Mayo."

In the evenings he was much more inclined to be talkative, although what he had to say to the girl was unimportant to her—except that he was saying it. Some little thing he wanted her to do on the morrow, questions about phone calls that had come in during the day—and whether she thought Mrs. Reynolds would prefer for her birthday, which was coming soon, a wrist watch or one of those new fob watches he had noticed in a jewelry store window. Or what else could he get her, if he didn't get her a watch? Could Miss Mayo sort of think about the present, and let him know what should be done?

Miss Mayo could and did, openly encouraging, but inwardly annoyed.

Carol was used to the gun in the right-hand pocket of Fred's coat, and also the right-hand pocket of Paul's coat. At first, it had frightened her to be so near a gun which she knew was loaded and would be used instantly if there was any reason for using it. It was there and ready to be used.

Fred and Paul had only to take their hands off the wheel, dip those hands into their pockets and out the guns would come.

After a few rides with both Paul and Fred she wasn't so aware of the guns—their closeness. She took the pistols as a matter of course, and she wasn't shocked any more when, before they got out of the cars at the parking lot near the office, both men did the same thing, with almost the same movements, except that Paul was swifter at it than Fred. They took the guns from their pockets and put them quickly in a holder under their left arm pits. A shift and they were out of the pockets and into the leather holsters.

When they stood up, walked along, there was not a wrinkle in their coats to indicate where the gun was. Not a bulge.

In the late afternoons, in the office, Carol was nervous for fear Fred would come in around five or five-thirty. That meant he would see her home. When he was in the office all afternoon, it was a foregone conclusion that he would take her home. But when he was out, there was hope that he wouldn't come back and that Paul would take her home.

Along about five-thirty or quarter of six, Paul would say, if Fred was not there, "Taggart won't be in tonight. May be some time before I can get away. Have you anything special to go right home for?"

Carol never had. Even if she had she wouldn't have admitted it. So she would wait for Paul, alone in the outer office, her hat on and her coat and bag ready to pick up when he came out.

Sometimes he was waiting for a call from Washington, sometimes for an operative to report either on the phone or in person. She never heard what he said over the phone or to his operatives, for when he did his phoning, his door was closed, and when he had callers they were with him in his private office, the door also closed.

Carol never had liked to wait for anyone before, but she didn't mind waiting at all—it was beautiful anticipation.

The waiting extended over a good deal of time usually, for Paul had no sense of time as Fred had. Time meant nothing to Paul except for a definite appointment. So it was around seven o'clock, often later than that, when Paul finally came from his private office, his hat on and his bunch of keys jingling in his hands.

"Ready?"

Carol always was ready.

One evening, it was nearer eight when he was through and came into the reception room.

"Sorry I kept you so long."

"That's all right. I'm not going any place but home."

In the parking lot they got into his car, and before Paul started the motor he made the shift from his armpit holster with his revolver to his side coat pocket. This Carol was used to, too.

"Nothing has happened yet, Mr. Devlin," and she laughed a little as she settled back into the seat. She was sorry immediately that she had spoken because Paul might think that she didn't appreciate his escort—he might shift all the responsibility on Fred—

"I should be disappointed if nothing happened, Miss Mayo. Terribly disappointed. I've put all my hopes on something happening. It's got to."

This put a new light on the patient escorting by both Fred and Devlin. The girl took a deep breath. "You mean, you want something to happen?"

"I do. I told you this was a dangerous game, Miss Mayo, but that you were in with us, so you would have to digest the danger as well as we do. I want Nick Oliver to tip his hand. I'm expecting it.

"I've been annoying him a good deal lately, trying to make him very angry and I hope I've succeeded. If I haven't, I should be a very bad detective. He should be plenty nervous by this time. He doesn't know what I know, and he doesn't know what you know.

"He probably thinks you know a great deal because I've taken such excellent care of you—bringing you to

the office, and bringing you back to your home. I want him to feel that you are an important cog in my organization. I'm counting on Nick's losing his magnificent control—I've sniped at him purposely for that reason, and sniped at him dangerously.

"And I'm ready for him. He can't show his hand openly. He can't come out and kill me and have any suspicion thrown on him or his gang. That would be fatal to him, and he likes life too well. If I knew what to expect, I should be happier. But I don't. I only have to be prepared for anything."

The street suddenly seemed deserted and lonely to Carol. Then she had a feeling that she and Paul were alone in a great wood with packs of wolves behind them, and the wolves were getting closer and closer, and she and Paul were running faster and faster.

The next moment she knew that she was on Wilshire Boulevard and that there were other cars, some going their direction which was west, and some going east to town. That the boulevard was brightly lighted, the great lofty standards shining lustily. That at the cross streets, it seemed like day it was so light, not like night and eight-twenty which was the time on the clock on the dash.

She tried to laugh to herself at her fears, but she couldn't. They wouldn't brush away, even the nearness of Paul wouldn't take them away. She found herself looking above the windshield into one side of the double mirror through which she could see the back

window and the traffic behind. She wondered if they were being followed.

They turned off Wilshire at Western—her home was not far away, down a few blocks and to the right, but the streets here were not so well lighted as the boulevard.

Paul stopped the car in front of her apartment building. "I'll wait until you get inside. Good night, Miss Mayo."

"Good night, Mr. Devlin."

He watched her walk across the sidewalk to the entrance and then saw the lobby swallow her. He lighted a cigarette before he shifted gears, and while he took the first puff he started to think about her. A nice girl. A plucky girl. And very pretty. Fred was right about her beauty. The kind of a girl who grew and grew on you.

"Careful!" he said aloud as he jammed in his gear, but the next moment he was wondering whether she would consent to leave Los Angeles. After this case was finished, he wouldn't be here any longer, and he thought he would like Carol for a permanent secretary, if she would come with him.

Sometimes he thought of her as Carol, but when he was with her and speaking to her he was very careful that she should be addressed formally as "Miss Mayo."

CHAPTER TEN

Carol didn't think there was a hope in the world tonight. It was five-thirty and she and Fred were alone in the office. Any minute, Fred would be saying, "Ready to go home?" And they would be leaving, she without having seen Paul all day, for he had not been in the office.

Days when she didn't see Paul depressed Carol. They seemed such empty days, and the world such an empty world. It was bad enough to sit in the office doing hardly anything, but worse when the whole day went by without a glimpse of Paul, not even the sound of his voice over the telephone.

It had started out being a bright, sunny day—one of those clear California May days, not too warm, and yet no chill in the air. But at four o'clock the blue sky was touched with gray as if a veil covered it, and the sun was not so bright. Fog drifting in.

At five the sun in the west as it sank tried to pierce the fog, but couldn't, and was a dull dirty crimson ball above the horizon. As yet, the fog was high, but later when the cooler breezes of evening came on it would be lower, scurrying through the streets like flocks of running shadowy ghosts.

At five-thirty-five, Fred took up his hat but instead

of saying, "Ready to go home?" he said, "Paul wants you to wait for him. Doesn't know when he'll get in. That all right?"

"Yes, that's all right," Carol returned, trying to keep the sudden happiness that gushed over her from showing in her voice. "Yes, that's all right. I'm in no hurry." Fred, however, caught the brightened look in her eyes, caught the quiver in her voice and they went deep in him as if they were physical, positive, like the hard punch a fist might give to his body.

He went out after that, not because he wanted to, but because Paul had told him to leave at five-thirty, and he always obeyed orders when those orders came from Paul. He knew, too, that Carol didn't want him to stay, although of course she hadn't said so.

But he had a way these days of reading her mind, her every expression. If they were talking of Paul, of what Paul had done, of what he would do, she wanted to hear what he had to say. But when he wasn't talking about Paul, she didn't want him. Definitely she didn't.

It was becoming harder and harder for him to talk of Paul to Carol, because she was so eager for news of him, so avid—even though she tried to hide her feelings.

He could have told her sooner that Paul was dropping her at home that evening—he could have told her as soon as he came in from lunch which he had had with Paul, but he didn't.

So he tortured himself by letting the news wait, but at the last moment he had had to tell her anyway; had

to see the happiness that started shining like a bright light through her, deadening his own happiness which consisted simply and purely of being near her.

Fred was quite right. Carol was glad to be alone a while. As soon as the door shut on him, she promptly forgot him as completely as if he never had existed. She had Paul to think of—and the trip home which would last such a little while and yet would make her evening complete.

She had Jessica to think of, too—but, tonight, Jessica didn't matter so much, even when she looked up at the calendar and remarked aloud to the empty office in general, "Jessica and Paul have been engaged exactly three weeks today."

It was the present she was thinking of, the immediate future which would bring Paul. She felt much better when she didn't think of the possibilities of the near future.

An hour passed before Paul came hurrying in with his curt greeting, "Evening, Miss Mayo. I'll be a little longer. All right?"

He didn't wait to hear whether it would be all right, but went directly into his office, closing the door after him. At seven-thirty when he came out, Carol had on her hat and coat and was ready to go.

The high fog had become a low fog when they got into the car and started driving away. On the windshield was a veil of mist. Devlin reached up his hand

and immediately there was the click of the wiper in front of him.

Carol's view of the street was still obstructed by the mist, but she didn't care. It didn't matter whether she could see out or not. She was quite content as she was. The fog made the night more dear to her—it seemed to bring her closer to Paul.

It took her into a world where there was only he and she, the drifting mist around them, making a circle about them, holding them within that circle.

Paul drove slowly—but everybody was driving slowly, and the fog deadened the sound of the traffic until it was only a distant whir in the girl's ears. Or perhaps it was her own happiness singing up in her that softened the sounds of the street.

She looked through the windows and through the grayish fog she could see the street lights blurred and very far away. She could hear a voice every now and then, but that seemed far away.

"Bad night," Paul murmured, taking his hand and rubbing at the windshield, for the mist came through the open window and clung to the glass.

Beautiful night, Carol wanted to say. Beautiful. When you're happy any night is beautiful, even a night when the rain is coming down in torrents—she didn't say anything, however.

She just sat and hugged her joy, a smile on her lips, and her eyes shining. Jessica was very far away, for

the mist had blotted her out, taken her out of the circle, this little hallowed circle where Carol and Paul were.

Even the lighted shops that lined the sidewalks were very far away, hardly visible except at times through the fog. The street which was such a familiar one became a strange one, almost as if it were in another planet.

They stopped for traffic lights because a dim barely red glow in front of them which was the tail light of another car stopped, not because Paul could see the signals on the cross streets. They started when the faint red glow went ahead. The car back of them did the same thing. Sometimes they stopped jerkily because the red glow in front was so faint.

"Western Avenue, this should be," Paul said, and he made the turn to the left, safely. Here there was no faint red glow ahead, so they crawled again, close to the curb, and Paul, instead of looking through the windshield, was bending out the window.

Carol could feel the wet chilly fog on her face. It felt good. She put her hands to her hair and found it was damp, too, and clinging in curls the way it did when she put a wet comb through it.

They turned, soon, to another street, which was still another gray swirling world, and Paul muttered something to himself that Carol did not hear. He was driving even more slowly, crawling along.

She did hear his next words. "There's someone be-

hind us—been following us. Don't know who it is, can't tell."

The girl looked out the window and behind, but could not see much either except the curtain of thick fog. "No headlights," she said. "Or perhaps the fog is too heavy."

"Headlights were shut off when we turned into this street."

The feeling of contentment fell away suddenly, and she caught Paul's tension. The car which had seemed so safe, and the circle which had seemed so hallowed became not safe, and not hallowed.

For a moment she was frightened, and then she grew calm, calmer than she thought she could be. Wasn't Paul with her? Wasn't the car going very slowly—nothing could happen when they were creeping along like this.

"Looked to me like a truck," Paul was saying more to himself than to her. "Looked like a truck when I first noticed it."

Carol who had paid no attention to anything but her own contentment had noticed nothing but the red light ahead on Wilshire. She had not even looked behind.

Paul fumbled in his right-hand coat pocket and Carol saw him take out his revolver, saw it black in his hand as it rested on the wheel, black against the whiteness of his hand.

"I don't hear anything—anything like another car behind us—" Carol said.

"No, there's nothing now."

"Everything's all right, then?"

"No—"

But he hardly had said the words, when there was a grinding sound behind them, and then the terrible sound of a crash, and something that followed the crash that seemed to the girl like the shot of a gun. All this so quickly, all this suddenly. Then Carol felt a pain in her head and had the feeling that she was being lifted in the air.

It was when she was in the air that she heard what appeared to be a second shot—but this was farther away than the first had been. The first had been very close—next to her.

She opened her eyes, but it was very little different with her eyes open or shut. Black, when her eyes were closed. Gray, when she opened them. Drifting mist. She could see nothing but the mist and she could hear nothing, not a sound. Everything was so terribly quiet. She moved her fingers, then her arms, then her head.

There was a dull ache in it somewhere when she moved it, but she was thankful she could move. She wasn't badly hurt—if she could move.

Still she didn't try to rise, even to a sitting position. She lay there, her fingers feeling the prickle of something. Grass, some vagrant reminder told her. She had fallen on some grass, probably the parking strip on a lawn. She stretched her fingers a little farther and encountered something sharper than the grass. A shrub

she thought because among the branches she could feel leaves, too.

"Paul," she said, but not aloud. It was her mind speaking. "Paul—where are you?"

She listened again, but there was nothing, except a little drip, drip, drip near her like the drip of a water faucet. The mist turning into rain falling from one leaf to another on the shrub she could not see but could feel.

Slowly she tried to remember what had happened—Paul's concern about the car behind them which she hadn't seen but which Paul had. The crash—but there had been a sound before the crash, hadn't there? Yes, the sound of a noisy motor racing. She remembered that now. Right after the crash, the pistol shot so close to her that it shook her body as much as the crash had.

"Paul!" her body cried, but her lips were silent, although they moved when she tried to call his name. "Paul!"

Was it Paul who had been shot? Killed —

She struggled to her knees and stayed there swaying back and forth, too dizzy to get to her feet.

Once, she thought she would have to lie down again because the effort of getting up had been too great. She didn't, though. She kept telling herself that she had to find Paul, that he was somewhere around, unconscious, probably, dead, maybe. . . .

"Oh, God, don't take him away from me. . . ." She

heard herself sobbing in the fog, but it was like the sobbing of someone far away, someone who was herself and yet not herself. All the time she was wondering why no one came, why she was here alone, Paul helpless near her, she helpless to get to him.

In her fright she didn't hear him calling her at first, didn't hear the running steps on the sidewalk. When she did hear him, the sound of his voice brought her weakness back and she slipped back on the grass, dizzy and thankful and almost hysterical, so hysterical she couldn't call to him, tell him where she was.

While she was lying, trying to find words to speak, she could hear him calling, "Carol! Carol!" and it seemed so natural for him to call her Carol that she didn't realize for some time that it was the first time she had heard this name on his lips.

"Carol!"

"Here I am—"

The words came feebly, but they brought him to her side at once, and he fell on his knees.

"You hurt?"

The touch of his hands on her face, the gentle sure touch of them. His fingers drifting over her forehead, over her shoulders. The sharp concern in his voice. She wished it would always be this way. Why couldn't it be?

"No," she managed to say, as she tried to sit up. "I think I'm all right. Are you?"

"I'm going to carry you to your place. Don't want

to stay around here any longer than I can help. There!"

She was in his arms, and her head was close to his chest.

It was the way she always wanted it to be—the way it always had been in her dreams—only this was no dream. This was real, even if the mist and the fog looked like a dream around her.

This was real, and her cheek was feeling the soft cloth of Paul's coat, her ear was hearing the beating of his heart as he half walked and half ran with her in his arms.

The lobby of her flat building was another world—not the world of whirling mist, but a world of prosaic rugs and sturdy chairs and people who looked curiously away from their newspapers. The manager hurried to them from his desk.

"Was there an accident? We thought we heard a crash, but it seemed pretty far away."

"Knocked in the fog," Paul said, still holding Carol in his arms.

"I think I could walk now—" she murmured. "I'm not so dizzy any more."

"Anything I can do?" the manager asked.

"Nothing but open the door to this young lady's apartment. I imagine she's lost her key." He set Carol down gently, but his arm remained around her waist. The girl took a few slow steps and smiled at him.

Still with his arm around her, they went to the ele-

vator, the manager leading the way. On the fifth floor the manager unlocked the door of "502," lingered awhile in the doorway, still insisting there was something he could do. Paul finally shut the door, and helped Carol to the couch.

It was then that the girl noticed the gash on his forehead.

"You're hurt!"

"Nothing—don't even feel it. I'll get you some water, and then I'll call a doctor."

"But I'm all right, now. Not dizzy or anything."

Paul shook his head, got the water, and then phoned a doctor. When the doctor came in about fifteen minutes, he pronounced Carol all right except for the shock, and he put a small plaster on Devlin's head.

"I thought I heard a shot right after the crash," Carol said when the doctor had gone and Paul was coming back from the door.

"You did."

"Then another shot—but that was when I was in mid-air."

"You did. I shot twice. One of my shots hit somebody, whether it was the first or the second, I don't know. When I examined the truck I found blood on the seat."

"You examined the truck?"

"Of course—and I'm going back now and do some more examining. Only had a minute before, because I

was worried about you. Now I'll have plenty of time to go over it thoroughly. I went to it right away because I thought one of my shots had struck home."

"Was there—was there anybody in the truck?"

"No, driver's seat empty—and I knew it was useless to follow in the fog—only wasting my time. In the morning, I'll get on the trail. Why don't you lean back and be comfortable? The doctor said you should rest."

She did lean back, but she couldn't relax. "Will you tell me, please, what happened?"

"Don't you know?"

"Everything happened so quickly that I don't know—" She was looking at the patch on his temple a little above his right eyebrow. If it had been any lower —a shudder passed over her.

"Well, as nearly as I can figure, this truck was following us down Wilshire. I couldn't see the license plates, partly on account of the fog, but principally because they were blurred. And of course I couldn't see the two men in the driver's cab."

"Two men?"

"Yes, I'm sure there were. When we turned off Western, I couldn't see the headlights any more, although I knew a car was behind us. I could hear it. It was going slower than we were."

"And then . . ." she prompted him, because he had paused.

"And then, Carol, I didn't hear the car any more.

Which meant to me, for I thought the turning off the truck lights suspicious enough, that we were in for it. I turned off our lights, and the moment I turned them off I heard the charging of the truck engine, then heard the crash, and I shot—out my window and into the cab of the truck.

"A shot in the dark, but I gauged my shot pretty accurately because I winged somebody. Who that somebody is, I don't know, but I may know soon. That's why I shot so I would know. The second shot I put in the same place, and that's all there is to it."

"You're quite sure there was somebody from Nick's gang in that truck?"

"The whole circumstances were suspicious, and I've been expecting something. I couldn't take any chances. It was a good night for an accident. If I find tomorrow that the truck is a stolen truck or that the license number is in any way suspicious, I'm right, and Nick engineered the accident. Lucky that neither of us was hurt. Now, I've got to go, and you're to rest, and not to think about coming down to the office until you feel better, Carol."

Carol again—but he was leaving, soon he would be gone, he was taking her hand now, shaking it. A strong, sure hand.

"Don't go!" Carol's mind, her body cried out to him. He went, but when she was alone, she was not alone as she had been before in the little flat. Paul

seemed to be every place, all around her, his voice echoing into her very heart.

And she could hear him say again and again those last words, "You've been a brave girl, Carol. No, you mustn't get up—"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Margaret Oliver was waiting in the library. Beside her on a stool was her knitting, but she hadn't been knitting for a long time. She had been sitting watching the door that led out on the porte cochère. Her face was white and it grew whiter as she waited. Her hands were still in her lap, loose, helpless small hands.

Seated in the library, too, was Nora Boles, but Nora was busy knitting. She had finished three squares for her afghan since she had been in the room. Her lips moved now and then as she counted her stitches.

"Nick said they'd be back in half an hour," Margaret said hopelessly. "That was an hour and a half ago. Oh, Nora, I know something's happened! Something terrible! The way Nick went out. And Larry saying he'd be back at ten at the latest, and then not coming at ten, and then that phone call for Nick. It was about Larry, wasn't it? You were with him when the call came!"

"Far as I know, it wasn't about Larry. Don't you keep on worrying. What I told you is right. Nick was called out—that's all. He's often called out, you know that."

"But there was something up. Larry wouldn't tell me what it was, but it was something. He looked wor-

ried." Margaret raised her left hand and glanced at her wrist watch. Every minute on the dial was filled with anxiety tonight. Six o'clock when Larry had left—alone. No dinner, holding her in his arms longer than usual.

She knew then that something was happening, but he wouldn't tell her what he was going to do. "Something for Nick. Don't worry. I'll be back at ten." But his worry, his tension passed on to her as it always did, for their love made them one person, instead of two.

"And Nick was waiting at the phone all evening," she went on more to herself than to Nora, because it helped some to utter her thoughts aloud. "He was waiting for a call. I know what he's like when he's waiting for a call. Like a caged lion."

Nora knitted on. Not a flicker of sympathy showed on her features, but then sympathy was alien to Nora. One time in her life when she was very young she had had it, but that was very long ago.

"Go to bed, why don't you?" she said in a much different voice than she used to Mrs. Larry Oliver, when there were guests present. That voice was a rather oily one, but still full of deference. This voice was harsh and strident, her normal tones.

Margaret didn't hear her. "Nick was angry, too, when he went out, as if something had happened. Like he is when something comes up he doesn't like. Like that night he discovered Paul Devlin was a T-man. I

wish you'd tell me what that phone message was, Nora—"

"Nothing important." The woman was wishing Margaret would shut up. It was bad enough sitting here waiting and not knowing what to expect. But with Margaret chattering and chattering, the waiting was worse.

Nora was worried, too, but she never showed her worry. She could be calm in the worst sort of a catastrophe. The message for Nick had been an important one, and Nora knew every word of the message. Nick had told her.

Rod Alden calling and saying, "Granton, speaking, Nick. About that tennis game tomorrow. Have to break it, but I can play at one-thirty. All right?" To which Nick said it was all right for one-thirty.

Alden wasn't telling Nick about a tennis game, he was simply saying in code that there was trouble, plenty of trouble and Nick had to come at once to a prearranged meeting place. What the trouble was Nora didn't know and Nick didn't know. He wouldn't know until he saw Alden.

Boles had been driving the big car, but the watchman-operative who was across the street when the car pulled out in the fog hadn't seen Nick in it.

He had not even seen Boles. Nick was on the floor of the back seat. He had gone through the garden entrance to the garage and was in the tonneau and on the floor when Boles pulled out.

This was a ruse the Olivers often used, sometimes Margaret driving, sometimes Larry and, less often, Boles —with the big car. Only in emergencies did Boles take the wheel, and tonight was an emergency.

Nora looked at the clock above the fireplace. The hands pointed exactly to midnight. Nick had left at ten-thirty. Her eyes as she turned them back to her knitting displayed no unusual interest in the time nor the situation, but she did take a long breath as she resumed her work.

The breath might have meant she was tired and then again it might suggest suppressed excitement. Really, it meant both. She was tired, because she had worked hard all day—she and Sam had to work for their share of the queer-money plunder—and she was excited.

"I could have gone," she said to herself as she knitted. "I could have done it fine, with nothing happening. I begged Nick to let me, but he wouldn't. Larry and Alden! Couldn't be a worse choice, if a choice had to be made. I could have done it alone without any trouble."

At five minutes of twelve she put her knitting aside and walked out of the library without a word and went into the kitchen without turning on the light. Unlocking the door, she stepped out on the back porch and looked through the half-screened door into the night. Not so foggy now, the mist was going. She could see the hedge which was about three feet from where she was standing, the hedge that shielded the door.

Why couldn't it last—the fog? Why did it have to

go away when they needed it so badly—Nick above all? The night had begun so well with the fog—just the night for them.

She went back into the kitchen and shut the door quietly—the key hardly made a sound when she turned it in the lock, for the lock was well oiled.

She didn't want to go back to the library, but she went anyway because she didn't want to leave Margaret alone. The girl was liable to get hysterical and Nora had to watch her carefully so she wouldn't do anything rash. Not that Margaret ever had, but she might. You never could tell about girls like Margaret.

When she sat down again and took up her knitting, she was thinking how easy Margaret had everything. Nora didn't resent the fact that Larry didn't have to work, but she did resent the fact that Margaret was to be the lady and that Margaret got out of everything that was difficult.

She hated Margaret for her part as a lady. Every day that went by she hated her still more. And she hated her for her beauty and for her helplessness, as well as for the fact that she had nothing to do but to be beautiful and helpless.

"The kind of a woman Margaret is, is essential in our business, Nora," Nick had explained when he had come to Nora—not Boles—with his new plan. Nora had been more of a help to him in his rum-running days than Boles.

"We've got to have a hostess—and Margaret with a

little training will be fine. You'll like her when you meet her."

But Nora hadn't liked Margaret from the first sight of her. More than once, she had had a fierce struggle to control her temper over the girl. Tonight, she was having just such a fight with herself.

She would have liked nothing better than to spit out all the words of hate that had piled up in her mind against Margaret in these last two years. That was impossible, of course. Nick wouldn't stand for that a moment, and Nora worshipped Nick. Instead, when Boles came home she would use her biting tongue on him and, after that, her anger would not be so bad.

Margaret's ears were strained on the noises that came from the street—the rare noises, for Roxmore was not a main boulevard and, after midnight, few cars passed. Some did pass, however, and when Margaret heard the sound of their motors, she would look up, tense and hopeful. Nora didn't look up, however. She heard the cars as Margaret heard them, she was listening, too, but her listening took a different form.

Both of them knew the sound of the big car—they had waited up for it before. In the night, and on the quiet street the motor seemed to hum and they were familiar with the sound. Usually they could recognize it half a block away.

They both heard it at the same time tonight. Margaret jumped up, trembling violently, her hand pressed tight against her mouth to keep from crying out. Nora

quietly and leisurely put away her knitting, stuffed her squares back into her homely bulging brown linen bag.

She didn't get up at once, however. She sat for a few moments quite still, her hands folded in her lap. When the car turned into the driveway and was past the porte cochère on its way to the garage, she rose and went into the kitchen, Margaret following her. But they turned on no light in the kitchen. Nora unlocked the door and waited.

In the silence they could hear someone get out of the car and open the garage doors, then the light went on in the garage. Then the steps of a man, heavy steps, went back to the car, drove it in. Another sound of the doors closing.

More steps and soon the steps were closer, coming up the four back stairs to the stoop. Nora's hand was on the kitchen light switch, but she didn't click it until Boles was in the kitchen. Then she touched it and immediately after another button. This button turned out the flood light over the garages.

The Olivers always were circumspect when they entered or left the garage. They did what other normal law-abiding human beings did with their lights and their doors.

"Larry's been shot," Boles announced to the two women. "We've got him in the car. We're going to bring him in a little later. Alden's all right."

Nora knew better than to let Margaret scream. She put her heavy hand on the girl's mouth.

"Now, hush, you! This is no time to cry!"

It was fifteen minutes before Boles went out again to the garage, this time through the garden and through the garden garage door which opened noiselessly.

The kitchen was dark, no lights were on in the house except the upstairs hall light, the library light and the light in Nick's bedroom. This had been on all evening.

The two women were waiting in the dark kitchen when Boles and Nick came in, lugging Larry, who was bundled up in a blanket.

"Take him up to my room," Nick ordered gruffly.

"Larry! Larry!" Margaret sobbed, running up to the bundle the two men were carrying, Nick at the head and Boles at Larry's feet. "He's dead—I know he's dead! Larry!"

"Nora, will you keep Margaret quiet! And Margaret, Larry is not dead. He's alive. We've got him in this blanket so he won't leave a trail of blood behind him. The back stairs, Sam."

The little procession went forward in the darkness, the two men with their burden, and the two women after them, Nora keeping a tight grip on Margaret's arm, for she felt she couldn't trust her.

In Nick's bedroom the light was welcome. Even Nora was glad of it. She was glad, too, that when he was on the bed, Larry's eyes opened and he looked around the room until he found Margaret's face, and then he smiled.

"You'll know what to do, Nora," Nick said. "Bathe

him and see that he's comfortable. Shouldn't have brought him home here, but there was nothing else I could do. Alden got him away all right, but Devlin winged the car twice, and one of the bullets caught Larry. It's his shoulder—and he's lost some blood."

So it was Nora who made Larry comfortable, not Margaret. Margaret could only sit on the floor by the bed holding his hand, patting it, tears raining down her face.

It was Nora who took off the stained corduroys, cut away the heavy dark-blue woolen shirt with Nick's desk scissors, bathed the ugly wound below Larry's left shoulder. It was she who probed around in the wound for the bullet and couldn't find it.

Now and then she issued a sharp order which either Boles or Nick obeyed promptly, for Margaret didn't hear the orders, she didn't hear anything but her own heart telling her that Larry was hurt, didn't see anything but the torn flesh on his shoulder.

Once she fainted, but no one in the room knew it, and she lay on the floor for a time until she came to her senses, and found Larry's hand again.

Nursing was not new to Nora. She had nursed before in emergencies. She had probed for bullets before, and she had cared for her patients briskly, efficiently, though not tenderly, until they were well. Boles knew her nursing—he had had plenty of it. A born nurse, he told his friends, Nora was. Always got you well in no time.

Nick also knew of Nora's nursing, although he had never had any of it himself. Some of his men had in years past and he agreed with Boles. A born nurse.

"How does he look?" he asked Nora.

"Pretty weak from loss of blood, but all right otherwise, I should say. I don't think there's anything to worry about."

"We've got to get a doctor!" Margaret broke in, for the awful fear she had had was leaving. "Nick, we've got to get a doctor right away!"

Nick paid no attention to her, so she rose to her feet and shook his arm. "Nick, we've got to get a doctor!"

"Listen, Margaret. I'm handling this. You're all right, aren't you, Larry?" He turned to Larry, who was being expertly bandaged by Nora, and whose eyes were open again.

"Sure—all right, Nick," Larry murmured weakly.

"Will you tell Margaret that you're all right, and that Nora will take good care of you and that we can't possibly have a doctor for you?"

Larry's speech came thickly.

"Darling, do—what Nick says. Everything. No need to have a doctor. I'm—all right—besides dangerous to have a doctor tonight.

"We can't have anyone know about me—especially Devlin. Fatal to us—you'll understand when you think about it. Nora can manage me.

"She's as good as a doctor, aren't you, Nora?"

"Sure am, Larry."

"So you see, there—is—nothing to worry about—nothing. You trust Nick. See, sweet?"

Great beads of perspiration gathered on his forehead and his eyes closed. The effort of talking had been great.

Nick took charge once more briskly. "Now, everything is to go on as usual. That's our only hope. What have you planned tomorrow, Margaret? Wasn't there some luncheon you were going to?"

"Yes, but I won't go now—"

"But you shall. We have to go on as if nothing were the matter with Larry. You'll go to your luncheon, you'll do the things you usually do, and I'll do the things I usually do. Won't matter about Nora and Sam. They're in the house, anyway. Tomorrow, Larry will go with me to town for awhile—"

"To town!" Margaret exclaimed brokenly.

Nick nodded. "He has to. He'll be able to get up tomorrow, don't you think, Nora?"

"I'm sure he will," she answered determinedly, implying that, if he wasn't, she would see that he got up anyway.

Nick argued patiently with Margaret. Inwardly, he didn't feel patient at all. He was getting exasperated. "You see, Margaret," he explained, as he might to a child: "Devlin knows by this time he hit somebody with one of his bullets—he shot twice. Alden got Larry away immediately—carried him away, but Alden says there must be some blood in the cab of the truck. Devlin nat-

urally knows his bullet hit somebody. He doesn't know it was Larry he hit. Understand that?"

Margaret lifted her cheek from her husband's hand. Her lips were open and her eyes were the eyes of an animal who has been hurt. She didn't say anything.

"We can't let him think that Larry has been hurt. We can't even let him suspect that Larry was hit. Neither can I let him suspect that it might be any of us in that truck. So I'm going to town tomorrow, and Larry is going with me, just long enough for Devlin to know Larry is about and well.

"That's the way it has to be. I'm only protecting Larry—and you. We'll get Larry out of bed, and we'll put him right back to bed when we get back. An hour out of bed won't hurt him, will it, Nora?"

"Not a bit."

Sam Boles and Nick left the room after that, leaving Larry to Margaret and Nora. Nora took cat naps in Nick's big chair, rising now and then to look to her patient, feel his pulse, put her hand to his heart.

Margaret stayed by the bed. She was still sitting on the floor. She didn't sleep, she didn't have any inclination to sleep. Every time Larry moved, she was alert, frightened, looking toward Nora. In their married life together Larry never had been ill. Indeed Margaret never had been around anyone who was seriously ill.

The dawn came, and then the day, and with every restless movement Larry made, Margaret felt his pain, as if the pain were in her own body.

"He can't go out—he isn't able," she whispered to Nora. "Nick has no right to expect him to go."

"He's got to go, Margaret. You don't want him arrested, do you? You don't want all of us arrested, do you? In prison for the rest of our lives? Certainly I don't want to go to prison. Paul Devlin has got to see some way today that Larry is strong and unhurt, and the only way we can manage that is to have Larry go down town with Nick.

"Don't you worry about Devlin not finding out that Larry is up and around. He'll know. We're all sitting on dynamite right now—you as well as the rest of us. You're in this as deep as we are."

"I'd rather go to prison than have anything happen to Larry—"

Nora saw it was useless, so she didn't say anything more. Later, when she was downstairs eating the breakfast Sam had prepared, she spoke to Nick about Margaret's attitude and it was agreed between them that Larry should have a long talk with his wife as soon as he woke up. Nick thought everything would be all right, then.

"He's able to go to town with me, isn't he, Nora?"

"Well, sure," the woman replied. "He's got to go. There's no other way we can be safe. He's got to go, whether he's able or not."

"He won't collapse on me or anything like that?" Nick looked worried.

"I don't think so—but Margaret's right about the doctor. He needs one—"

"He can't have one here!"

"I know, I know, and I'm doing what I can for him. I think he must have lost a good deal of blood, and a doctor would give him a couple of transfusions right away. We may be able to manage. I guess we have to."

"We have to. I'm relying on you to get him well. Lucky it was his shoulder, not a leg. We'd be lost if it was a leg—"

"Everything else all right? The truck?"

"Of course. Truck is registered in Alden's name, and Devlin has no way in the world of suspecting him. Alden reported the truck stolen at six o'clock. If Devlin hadn't been so quick on the trigger—God, how that man shoots! Alden said the shot came not a second later than the crash."

"Alden safe?"

"Yes, he carried Larry away to an empty open garage. Left him there until he could get his own car, then took him home, called me from town on another later trip."

CHAPTER TWELVE

Neither Paul nor Fred were on hand the following morning, when Carol started to town, but she didn't expect either of them. Paul had given her instructions not to come to the office. To rest. But she didn't feel like resting. She felt all right, and she had to see Paul, and she couldn't see him if she stayed at home, so she was at the office promptly at nine.

Fred scolded her soundly when she came in, ordered her back home, but she shook her head, took off her hat and sat down at her desk.

Paul came in at ten and frowned when he saw her. "Thought I told you to stay home, Miss Mayo." Then he walked swiftly past her and went into his office.

All the joy Carol had been feeling—the joy that had started when Paul had called her "Carol" last evening, the joy that had piled up, mountains of it, when he carried her to her apartment, stayed with her there for awhile, now collapsed as if the joy were a gigantic balloon and the prick of a pin had burst the rubber.

She looked across at Fred, but he was studying some charts. He didn't know of course all that had happened last night, all the things that were so dear to her. The little things that meant so much to her. Paul's arms

around her, the tenderness in his voice as he asked her if she were hurt.

It was tenderness, wasn't it? Real concern? That's the way it had seemed to the girl in the fog last evening —and later in her tiny flat with Paul bringing her a glass of water, insisting she drink it, calling a doctor, and saying, "I've got a sick girl here—"

Miss Mayo. Last night she had been Carol, not once, but three times. Carol, Carol, Carol. Today she was plain Miss Mayo once more, Mr. Devlin's secretary. "Thought I told you to stay home, Miss Mayo."

Tears came to her eyes, and she turned to the filing cabinet so that if Fred looked up he wouldn't see them.

Last night, to be Carol. This morning, to be Miss Mayo. As she had been ever since she had been working for Paul. . . .

He came to the door and called Fred, but Carol didn't turn. She still wasn't sure enough of herself, and she was fussing with the filing cabinets which held only a few letters, for Paul's correspondence with Ralph Winslow clients was not very great.

Fred didn't know why there should be such a change in Carol—but he did see the change as soon as Devlin addressed her, and he was wondering about it when he sat down opposite his chief.

"Taylor reports that the big car left the Oliver place at ten-thirty last night. He thought Boles might be driving, but he wasn't sure. He couldn't see, of course, in the fog. But he thought he recognized Boles' foot-

steps and the way he handled the car. Car came back shortly after midnight. Still pretty foggy, but not so bad as it had been. He says one man got out of the car, quite as usual."

"And the truck?"

"Truck registered in the name of Rodney Alden, who reported it stolen at six last night, when he got home from work. Truck belongs to his brother, or rather did belong to his brother. But his brother couldn't keep up the payments, so Alden took it over for an investment.

"He's got it advertised for sale. Wife not home, no one at home when truck was taken. Alden a cigar salesman. Seems all right on the surface, but I'm looking into him—or rather you are, for that's to be your job for the next couple of days.

"I want his history as far back as you can get it. Bank balance, any extra funds, everything. Here's the address, both home and business." Paul slid a card over to Fred.

"Got somebody on the Oliver house today?"

Paul nodded. "Taylor is taking the job for today, too. Couldn't get anybody else at the moment. He's reporting down the street to another operative every hour, who phones me."

"Anything yet?"

"Boles came out the back entrance and to the front lawn at eight. Seemed in excellent health as usual. Margaret Oliver came out at nine-thirty with her flower basket to pick flowers. Started in the front. Also

seemed as usual—and nine-thirty is when she starts in the garden according to another man I've had on the job, when I could, during the day—you know, Simmons. That's all. I'm waiting for reports on Nick and Larry."

"Think you might have got one of them?"

"Don't know. Hope so."

"Too much luck, Paul. Neither of them would have gone, certainly not Nick," and Taggart shook his head. There were times when he wished that Devlin would take him closer in his confidence, times when he felt out of everything.

He wanted to know why Paul did this, why he did that, and he couldn't understand how Paul could work along on a hunch—and sometimes have his hunches so brilliantly successful. Sometimes they were frightful failures, too, and then Paul would forget them as quickly as possible. The successes, he and Taggart liked to remember.

For instance, Paul's hunch that Nick would try to pull something. That Nick was getting tired of surveillance. Had Paul been psychic? Taggart had scoffed at the idea when his chief suggested it suddenly one day. "He's too smart, Nick is," Fred had remonstrated. "Isn't worth thinking about."

"Who's too smart?" Devlin had argued. "You're wrong, Fred. Nick is sick of me. He doesn't want me around any more, or you. He is going to do something. You watch."

"He'll stop his operations for a while."

"But he won't. He won't dare. He's too smart for that. He knows he's safe as long as I don't know where his plant is, and so long as he isn't caught with any of his stuff, and he knows I don't know where the plant is, or I would have been there before this. He's got to keep running his stuff in his presses wherever they are and out into circulation.

"If he stops running, he knows I'm going to clamp down all the harder—and another thing, he can't afford to. He must have some money set aside—but he hasn't been operating long enough to have all he wants, and his front is expensive—more expensive than you think.

"Don't forget that Nick is proud of his position. He doesn't want to lose it. He won't if he can help it."

"You're just wasting your time," Fred had argued back.

"No time is wasted, Fred, when you're trying to outwit a criminal. You've got a lot to learn yet."

Fred knew he had a lot to learn, but he knew, too, that Paul's hunches which weren't hunches at all, but fine headwork, made him the detective he was. Because Paul could anticipate, he had been ready for the accident last night. Fred didn't mind doing the spadework—that had to be done. It was as necessary as the headwork and as important in its way.

He rose, the card in his hand, to do the spadework on Rodney Alden, but when he was halfway to the door, the phone rang and Paul motioned him back. The

phone that rang was not the main office phone, but Paul's private instrument which he always answered himself, and which when he was out Carol had to go into his office to answer.

He was frowning when he finished his conversation and put the instrument back on its standard.

"Taylor reports that Nick and Larry left the house at exactly ten-forty-five. Nick went to the garage and got out the car. Larry got in at the library entrance. They drove off immediately. Both of them, Taylor says, looked in good health. He didn't see Larry walking, however. The car I have down the block is following. I'll have another report when they get to their destination. Taylor is still watching the house."

"I'd better get on—"

"Yes, but come in about twelve-thirty."

Paul stayed in his office alone going over every detail of the Oliver case, which he kept in a locked safe. He read over the pages and pages of reports which he had typed himself from reports of his operatives and his own observations.

There were some pages in the reports which Fred Taggart had not seen, and was not to see until the case was closed—which even his chief in Washington did not know about. Lines following his own hunches, private hunches, which were still too private to divulge to anyone.

His private phone rang twice during the morning, and he made his own particular shorthand notes on the

conversations he held, slipped those notes into his reports to be typed when he had time, at his home.

"Nick and Larry came down to Ritter and Company, brokers, on Hill Street," he told Fred later. "Larry sold two hundred shares of Trans-America at twelve and one-half, gave orders to his broker to buy in again at eleven. Both of them walked from the parking lot to the Ritter office. Both seemed O.K.

"When they came out, they went into a bar next door, and both had a straight scotch, then they went back to the car and drove away—Nick driving. So that's that.

"Another call from Taylor just now. Margaret Oliver left the house at twelve-twenty driving the large coupé. I imagine she's bound for the Crabbe luncheon —that's today, and we got a report on the telephoned invitation ten days ago."

"Not so hot, eh?"

"Not so hot. Maybe I'm wrong, Fred. Maybe the gang is bigger than I thought it was. I've been working all this time on the premise of a small gang—it's the only way they could have fooled us this long. A close small compact gang. Now this, and I've got to change my plans a little. Quite a little."

Carol walked past the spot where the truck had charged against Paul Devlin's car. Not once but twice a day, going to work and coming back. For four days, that was eight trips, she had paused at the exact spot and said to herself, "Here is where it happened." And

always when she said the words silently, there was the incredulous feeling after she said them that it hadn't happened at all.

The spot seemed so serene, sometimes a car parked at the curb, sometimes not. Sometimes someone walking down the sidewalk passing her at the spot.

"And here's where I fell. Here's where Paul picked me up in his arms."

Those words, too, had a puzzling unreality about them. They didn't ring true.

"He carried me up this walk." Those, too, were vague as she repeated them every time she trod the sidewalk.

And when she went into her flat. "You did come in here, didn't you, Paul? You did, and you sat on that chair after the doctor left and talked to me."

Then she would touch the bruise which blackened her shoulder, and wince with pain. Of course it had happened. She still had definite evidences of its happening. She was still a little lame from the fall, and there were bruises on her body.

If she doubted it, she could look at the white patch above Paul's left temple, and find the truth there. The reality. She could look in her purse and see the check which Paul had made out for her for fifty dollars, and which Fred had given her. "A bonus," Fred had said.

Bruises and a bonus check and the patch over Paul's eye—and yet Paul had mentioned nothing about the accident, nothing at all since he had left her flat that night.

They were on the same business plane that they had been on before that night—and four days had passed.

Only one little wisp of happiness to cling to, and that so small that it was hardly worth bothering about. But it did give the girl some satisfaction. Jessica, although she had phoned nearly every day, sometimes getting Paul and sometimes not, had not been in the office. Neither had Carol had to choose any more gifts for her.

When she thought about it she realized what a little comfort it was, but then it was something—and these days she needed something to bring her out of the blues.

Pinning so much hope on that night, riding that hope so high, and falling so far with it. Carol, Carol, Carol. . . .

Well, today, anyway, she'd have an excuse to speak to Paul less formally. She'd thank him for the check, because she hadn't seen him last night before she left the office. Thank him for the check and then he'd have to say something besides, "Yes, Miss Mayo. Nice morning, Miss Mayo. Any calls, Miss Mayo?"

Paul wasn't in the office all morning, however, neither was Fred, but Fred came in in the early afternoon.

"Will Mr. Devlin be in today?" Carol asked anxiously.

"Don't think so."

The thanks would have to wait until tomorrow, then, and Carol was disappointed. There were so many things that disappointed her these days.

Fred caught her sigh and the hurt expression on her face as he went into Devlin's office, and his own spirits

fell a little more. They had been low when he came into the office, anyway.

He stayed at Paul's desk for half an hour, doing nothing in particular and having a great deal to do, because Devlin would expect his reports on Alden this evening.

But he didn't feel like working. Usually he could prod himself to finish some task that he had begun, but today he couldn't. He kept thinking of Carol as he fiddled with his pencil, as he dropped the pencil and sat with folded hands on the desk, looking at the wall.

The wall gave him no comfort, nor Paul's office, nor the thought that Carol was out in the other room close at hand. Nor the arguments his mind was supplying.

"I should tell her. I must tell her. She has to be prepared. She'll find out and if she doesn't know beforehand—" this was the argument for going immediately to the reception room and facing Carol.

"Why should I be the one to tell her? She'll find out and, when she does and by herself, that will be time enough. What is it to me, if she should stumble on it suddenly?"

But it was something to Fred. It was everything. He could say it didn't matter how Carol felt, how badly she was hurt, but it did matter. She was Carol and he loved her, and her hurt was his. And if he could prepare her gently—

At last he got up and went back into the reception room, straight to his desk, not the girl's, and began

searching for some imaginary paper in one of the drawers.

Carol didn't look up. She was typing a letter to her mother and although she was conscious that he was in the room, she was conscious of it in the way that she was of the furnishings of the office or the office itself.

"Well, I guess we can expect it any day now—" Fred began. But Carol went on typing, so he repeated what he had said in a louder voice.

She looked up. "Speaking to me, Fred?"

"Yes. I said we could expect it any day now."

"Expect what?"

"Paul's marriage." It was out, but he felt no relief having it out. She didn't understand. She was looking at him puzzled.

"Paul's marriage? Did you say Paul's marriage?"

"Yes, I went up with him and Mrs. Reynolds this noon to get the license." Fred was uncomfortably warm, although his suit was a light one. She still didn't understand.

"You went there with Paul and Mrs. Reynolds."

"I went to the bureau with them. They made application for their marriage license." He was opening another drawer, as he said that, taking out some papers. He didn't dare look at her. The room was very quiet, a heavy, leaden quiet. He had a feeling that Carol was holding her breath. He knew she was.

"Yes." He had to say something to break the tension, to break the silence. "Yes, they'll be married any

day now. Have to wait, you know, for three full days to intervene before they can be married. But I imagine from what Paul said that after the three days they'll have the wedding."

Because he couldn't stand the room any longer, nor even the thought of going into Paul's office, he picked up his hat which was on his desk, murmured that he had to get off, and was gone.

Carol sat looking at the door he had closed after him, then at the black type on the white paper in her typewriter. "And, Mother, I got a check from Mr. Devlin last night for $50. It's a bonus for good work, so tomorrow noon, if I get time, I'm going to go out and splurge the whole $50 on a new outfit—"

The type although it was only about fifteen inches from her eyes, drifted farther away, blurring as it drifted. Strange that one minute she could be writing to her mother and the next—

"—I don't believe it. Fred was only kidding me—"

Carol became for a minute or so a little dynamo. She pushed back her chair with a jerk, took up the telephone book and started riffling through its pages hurriedly. County of Los Angeles—here it was. Her eyes sped through the offices until they settled on the department she wanted. Marriage License Bureau.

Of course Fred had been kidding. . . .

She dialed the number she wanted, fiercely and swiftly.

"This is a reporter for the *Herald-Express* talking,"

she lied. "I want to know whether a license was issued today to Paul Devlin and Mrs. Jessica Reynolds."

The voice at the other end, a girlish singsong voice, said to wait. She'd look it up.

So Carol waited, and as she waited the phone she was holding grew heavier and heavier. Finally the voice came back.

"Yes, a license was issued to Paul Devlin and Mrs. Jessica Reynolds today. Any more information?"

"No—thanks, that's—all."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Nora didn't say it in front of Margaret. She took Nick outside the bedroom and told him in the hall.

"He can't go out today, Nick. That's all. He's pretty weak—weaker than he's been. Perhaps tomorrow he'll be better, if you let him rest today."

Nick scowled. "Thought you said yesterday he was better."

"He was, but today's he's worse again. Of course, if it's necessary, well, he could. But he's been out now three days with you, and that should be all right."

"We'll let it go today, then—but there was that party tonight. I thought he might possibly go for a little while—stay half an hour or so and then I'll manage a phone call and we'll both go away."

Nora shook her head emphatically. "I'd say no. His heart is weak, sometimes I can hardly catch the beat. He's better at home."

Nora didn't look as well as she had several days before. There were tired lines around her eyes and her mouth was sagging. Nora had tremendous strength and reserve but that strength and reserve were being taxed severely.

Besides the worry about Larry—and although she didn't show her worry, she worried all the same,—there

was the added work of caring for the invalid, being responsible for him. Because she was responsible to Nick, she felt her responsibility all the more keenly.

Then, there was Margaret. She was almost as great a care as Larry, that is she had been until today. Today she was calming down, and Nora was very glad about that. It was bad enough to have a sick man on your hands—but when you had his wife, too, crying for doctors and hospitals and crying and moaning that she loved Larry so—well, Nora had been patient, because Nick had told her to be patient. But that was the only reason.

Many times in the last four days she had wanted to put her hands around Margaret's throat and throttle her. Instead, because she was being patient for Nick's sake, she gave the girl bromides.

She went back into Nick's bedroom which was still used as the sick room because it was at the back of the house and because it was too hard now to change it. Margaret was sitting in a low rocker by the bed, rocking, her body bent forward, her hands clasped on her knees. Larry was asleep, but he was breathing heavily.

"Surely Nick is not going to insist on Larry's going out today," she said slowly. Her voice had a hollow quality.

"No. Larry is so much better today, that I think if he stays in bed, he'll be all right tomorrow," Nora replied, going to her patient and lifting his hand from under the covers.

Margaret said nothing more. She couldn't say anything, because she knew what Nora meant. She knew that Nora was lying. Larry was worse. Otherwise they would have forced him out. Larry was worse, Larry was worse.

She didn't cry, she was past tears now. All the tears in her had hardened into a rock of hate against Nick and against Nora. Her whole body seemed to be the rock of hate.

No, she couldn't cry any more, and she wished she hadn't cried so much in the beginning. She had wasted so much time. She had killed Larry herself by her tears and her hysteria. If she had been wiser, like Nick and Nora, she could have saved him.

But she hadn't. She had let him sink and sink and sink and had done nothing about saving him. A life gone, a life she loved more than any other life, because she had been a child with her childish tears.

Overnight, Margaret had grown up. Her childhood had been left behind. She was a woman. More than a woman, she was an old woman. Never again would she be young, and gay and carefree.

Nora didn't have to tell her that Larry was dying. She knew it. She had known it this morning when she awakened from a short nap in the sick room. She had gone to sleep crying, worn out from the fatigue of her worry and love. She had awakened calmly with the secret knowledge that Larry was dying.

Yesterday, if such a thought had come to her with

such surety, she would not have been able to control herself. Today, she could. She could look at Larry and say to herself, "He's with me now, but he won't be in a little while. Tomorrow he won't be, and I'll be alone, alone."

Every time she was alone in the room with him—which was not often, because Nora did not leave very much—she could say her good-byes to him tenderly. She could bend down and kiss his forehead and whisper words in his ear that she thought he could hear deep down in his heart. Words meant for him alone. She could put her hot cheek against his hot cheek and ask him what she was going to do without him. He didn't answer, of course. He couldn't, although at dawn this morning he had smiled and spoken to her a little in the dim darkness of the room, with Nora asleep.

Nora was taking out her little lamp from the drawer, lighting the wick with a match, putting her hypodermic needle under the flame.

Margaret knew what she was doing. For in her new calmness and acceptances, had come a new knowledge. Nora was going to give Larry something for his heart—it was failing.

Without a word, without even a catch of her breath, she watched the woman sponge off Larry's right arm with alcohol, dig into the poor flesh with the hypo, take the hypo out, hold it toward Margaret. The girl took it, and Nora's fingers were at Larry's pulse.

"It won't do any good—what you've put into his

body to make his heart beat," the girl wanted to say. "It's too late now. You should know it's too late." But she didn't say it. She simply watched Nora taking Larry's pulse.

"Fine," Nora murmured, putting his hand back under the cover, and again Margaret knew she was lying for her benefit. "You'd be surprised how much better his heart is."

"Is it?"

Larry's breathing became heavier. His heart was trying to pump his blood through his body, but it was difficult work, almost too difficult.

"I'm staying here," Margaret said after a while. "Why don't you go down stairs?'

"You haven't been in the garden today, Margaret. You'd better go. Nick wants everything to go on as usual. And the gardener is here this morning, you know, and you always go out and talk to him when he's here."

Yesterday, Margaret would have objected and Nick would have had to be called in to settle the discussion. But, today, Margaret didn't object. She got up quietly, went to her room and changed her clothes.

In her blue faded overalls and her white boy's shirt and big wide hat, she made a pretty picture as she went out into the garden. For half an hour, she talked to the gardener, who came three mornings a week, and with whom Mrs. Oliver was a favorite patron because she loved her flowers so much.

She told him what she wanted done with the nasturtiums, which weren't doing as well as she wanted them to do. They discussed insecticides, and the sudden influx of snails in the marigolds, and they wondered together whether they had done right by leaving sulphur off the crowns of the delphinium this year, and why the small sycamore was beginning to blight when they had taken such good care of it.

The gardener thought Mrs. Oliver looked lovelier than ever—he was always holding her up as an example to his other gardening clients. Nick came out and joined them, wandering through the beds with them, listening to what they were saying but rarely making a comment.

Together Mrs. Oliver and the gardener got down on their knees and dug through some soil in the pansy bed to see whether by any chance there was mealy bug in the soil—Mrs. Oliver without her gloves, digging deep in the soil with her bare fingers.

Sometimes she wore gloves, the soft wash-leather gardening type, but more often she didn't. A real gardener liked the feel of the soil through his fingers, and Mrs. Oliver was a real gardener.

A fine woman, Mrs. Oliver, Joe thought, when she went in the house at noon. And a fine man, Mr. Nick, even if he didn't know anything about flowers.

At the porch, Margaret paused to steady herself against the door. She was suddenly dizzy and everything seemed to go black before her eyes. The effort of conversing with Joe had been almost too great. She

was all right, however, in a moment, and she stepped into the kitchen, Nick behind her.

Nora was talking to Boles, but the conversation stopped as soon as Margaret came in.

She stood looking from Nora to Nick, who was beside her. "I know. I know. You don't have to tell me," she said quietly. "He's dead—"

And then she shook off Nick's hand and walked swiftly through the kitchen and up the back stairs.

"She took it well enough," Nora whispered to the others.

Nick's first reaction was relief that Margaret didn't break down. His second reaction was something that was related to fear. He had always understood Margaret so perfectly, or he thought he had. A simple child who would do anything Larry asked her to because she loved his brother so much. Afraid, yes, but loyal to Larry because of her love for him.

But, now, with Larry dead, Margaret was a strange Margaret. She listened to what Nick had to say, then said anything was all right with her. She seemed to have lost interest in Larry.

In the first flurry of plans made, then unmade and then made all over again, Nick's relief at her lack of interest in her husband was a help. But when the final plans were finished and Nick had to go in to Margaret about them, he was puzzled, and became more and more puzzled as the time went on.

Margaret was not herself, certainly not herself. She

had only looked at him calmly, her face quite set when he had told her that Larry's body had to be taken out of the house that evening and disposed of because Nick had no intention of any trouble with the authorities about it.

She didn't even ask him where it was going to be taken or what Nick was going to do with it. She simply nodded and sat and looked at him with her big brown eyes.

"Anything you say, Nick." That's what she had said when he finished. "Anything you say."

That was what Nora would have said, if the same thing had happened to Sam. Yet Margaret wasn't Nora. She never had been anything like Nora. They were as different as the opposite poles. A girl couldn't change as completely and as suddenly as Margaret had changed.

Nora agreed with him there when he took his problem to her. "We'll watch her every minute. When I'm not with her, you manage to be with her. It may be the shock, and then again—"

"What, Nora?"

"It may be that she's planning something. You understand."

Nick did. He had been thinking the same thing himself, and as he nodded he felt a warm flood of anger come over him, anger toward his brother whose death had disturbed his plans, anger toward Margaret who was a problem now when she shouldn't have been, when his mind should be free for other, more important things.

"We'll have to keep her in the house. There's no other way."

Nick thought that was best, too. "We can get by with it for a few days, and give out that she has the flu. Lots of people have the flu now—there's an epidemic going around. Maybe in a few days—"

Nora was the one who agreed now with the curt nod. "Maybe in a few days she'll be all right. I don't like the look in her eyes. They've changed so. They're not Margaret's eyes."

"She's not to answer the telephone, nor to go into the garden—just keep her in her room. And anyone that calls—well, you'll know what to tell them. I'll dash around to the Grant's tonight a while—before I take Larry away and explain that Larry and Margaret are ill."

"Are we leaving, do you think?" Nora asked hesitantly.

"I don't see how we can at a moment's notice like this. My hunch is to wait awhile. Besides—there's someone I have to consult. I'll see what he says."

Not a flicker of Nora's eyes indicated she knew that instead of "he," Nick meant "she." Only recently, had she found out who Nick's partner was, and then only by intuition. Even Sam didn't know that she knew, although Sam had been trying to find out himself for a long time.

In their sojourn in the Oliver house, they had talked often of the "silent partner," but now that Nora had

discovered for her own information—and she was sure she was right—who the partner was, she had no more interest in what Sam said about the partner, although she listened all the same.

If Nick still wanted to camouflage the partner as masculine, that was well and good. Nora was content that she knew better.

She felt better now that she knew and Sam didn't know, and she wondered how she could have been so blind for two years.

"With this social set-up, we've got to be so careful. Isn't like it used to be. We could get out right away if anything came up," she said.

"I know, but this is a different business, Nora, from the other, and times are different. If we get up and leave, we give ourselves away."

"I like the other way best. I like to be ready to leave. I never did like this social front. Well, I'm ready to leave at any time—you only have to tell me. Sam and I have everything ready. We planned just what we would do."

The day passed very slowly for everybody in the house. Night never had come so reluctantly. They were all restless, even Margaret, although she didn't show her restlessness, physically. It was more an inner restlessness with her, racing through her worn nerves, grinding at her mind.

To Nora who sat in her room knitting, Margaret

seemed calm, and so quiet that she had to look up now and then to see if the girl were still there.

Margaret realized why she wasn't left alone. With her mind quickened by her sorrow, she saw through the little subterfuges of Nick and Nora—and of Sam, but she didn't say anything. Her sorrow, too, had made her wiser. She could wait, and she would wait, and all their plans would be for nothing.

So she made no effort to go to the phone when it rang. She let Nora answer it. She heard Nora say that Mrs. Oliver had come down with the flu—oh, very slight, they thought, nothing to worry about, but the doctor thought she ought to be in bed. Yes, Mr. Larry was a little better today—not the flu at all, but a severe cold. And thank you for phoning. She heard Nick say the same thing over the phone when he answered it and anyone inquired for her or Larry.

She did what they told her. When Nora suggested she have some dinner, she took the tray that Sam brought up, and tried to eat the soup he had prepared, for Sam was keeping up the kitchen end now, as he did often. Margaret had always thought he was a better cook than Nora. She didn't get the soup down, but she tried and won some approval from Nora.

She saw the dark come, saw it deepen, and knew what that meant, too. At eleven, she heard Nick and Sam take Larry downstairs, but she put her hands to her ears so she wouldn't hear any more. Where they were going to take him she didn't know, she hadn't asked.

Probably Nick would have told her, if she had asked. But Larry was gone from her forever. It didn't matter where they took him. She was alone. . . .

At midnight, Nora got into the bed Larry had occupied until his illness, and Margaret made no objection. At two, Nick and Sam came back, and Margaret got a little sleep, but so little that when she awakened, she had the feeling in her tired eyes and her tired body that she had never slept in all her life.

The next morning it was the same. Nora broke her appointment, a regular appointment every Wednesday at eleven, at her beauty shop. "Mrs. Oliver is ill and can't come today." But Nora's vigilance didn't let up. Margaret was not left alone for a minute.

She made plan after plan to get out of the house, rehearsed speech after speech to herself. She never really did go through with any of the speeches, though, nor with any of the plans. None of the speeches were good enough, none of the plans good enough.

Her new intelligence told her that. Her plan had to be fool-proof and yet so simple that neither Nick nor Nora would recognize it.

In the late afternoon of Wednesday, she had it, but she thought about it a good deal before she mentioned it to Nora.

"I'm going crazy, Nora!" she exclaimed suddenly. "I can't relax. I'm all tied up inside. I feel every nerve in my body. Those bromides don't do me any good—"

"Some warm milk would be good," the other suggested.

Margaret shook her head. "I wonder if Mrs. Campbell could come. If I could just get relaxed enough to cry again—I'd be all right. If I could only cry again!"

Nora was on her feet in an instant. Mrs. Campbell was a masseuse who came to the house occasionally for Margaret. Mrs. Campbell might be the solution to all their troubles. Nora was sorry she hadn't thought of her before. If Margaret could cry again—she went into Nick, talked with him a few moments and then came back to Margaret.

"Sure, I'll call her right now. Hope she hasn't left her office. Sure, that's what you need, we should have thought of it before. A good cry. She'll make you cry." Nora got through to Mrs. Campbell and Mrs. Campbell was fortunately at her office, and she would come right out.

Margaret was quite happy. Her little plan had succeeded. Nora didn't suspect anything. And Margaret had no intention of trying to cry. She felt at that moment as if she never would cry again, never even want to.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Mrs. Campbell didn't realize that the maid who had let her into Mrs. Oliver's bedroom was anywhere near. In fact she didn't think about the maid at all after she was once in the room. If anyone had asked her where the maid was, she would have answered sharply, "In the kitchen, I suppose."

Nora, however, was not in the kitchen, nor near the kitchen. She was five feet away from the bed where Margaret lay and over which Mrs. Campbell was standing rubbing Margaret's limbs with her strong firm hands. Five feet away from the bed was the door of the dressing room, and that door was a French door, with chiffon voile drawn over the panes. Nora was standing on the other side of the door, one of the curtains held back by her right hand.

The door was not entirely closed. It was open a crack. Even if it had not been opened, Nora could have heard every word that was said because the walls were thin into the dressing room. Not every whisper, though. That was why the door was opened a little. Nora wanted to catch even a whispered word.

Margaret knew Nora was close, knew she was in listening distance, and also knew that Nora had excellent ears, but she didn't care. She had no intention of

letting Nora hear anything she was going to say, because she wasn't going to say anything. Her plans were made, and under her pillow was a piece of paper which she somehow had to get to Mrs. Campbell before she left, and get it to her in such a way that Nora wouldn't suspect.

Nora hadn't even seen her write what was on the paper, for she had done it in her closet when she was slipping out of her clothes, preparatory to the massage. While Nora had been smoothing the bed and getting it ready.

The massage didn't soothe her as it would have once. In the past she had gloried in the luxury of Mrs. Campbell's massages.

"My, you are a bundle of nerves, aren't you?" Mrs. Campbell said. "But we'll have you all right before we go. This flu does funny things to people sometimes. Now my last patient—"

And Margaret had to hear all about the other woman Mrs. Campbell had worked on, and the patient before that, and another patient whom Margaret knew very well. She listened impatiently, because her mind was busy with the paper under the pillow, and with Nora so close at hand.

An hour went by but Mrs. Campbell stayed on, for she felt that Mrs. Oliver wasn't relaxed enough yet so that she could leave her. In an hour and a half, she finished, and miraculously Nora appeared from the dressing room.

"Nora, my purse is in the dresser drawer, I think," Margaret said. "No, the other—oh, I don't remember where I put it."

"I'll find it," Nora offered, opening drawer after drawer.

While Nora was opening the drawers, Margaret's hand slipped under the pillow, pulled out the paper and a bill that was pinned to the paper with a brooch she had had on when she went into the closet to write the note. One movement, a little movement forward, and the bill and the brooch and the paper were in Mrs. Campbell's uniform pocket.

Margaret was sure Mrs. Campbell didn't know, didn't feel her put them there, for she said nothing, did nothing but pat the covers, and then turn to go into the bathroom, through the dressing room to wash her hands.

"Here it is," Nora held up the purse. "How much will she want?"

"I usually give her five dollars. Oh, Nora, I really think I feel a little better."

Nora took a five dollar bill from the purse and had it ready for Mrs. Campbell when she came to get her coat and small bag.

Sam was standing outside Margaret's door ready to escort Mrs. Campbell downstairs to her car which stood on the street.

In the hush of early evening Nick and Nora and Margaret heard the door of the small coupé slam and the whirr of the old motor as it turned over. To Nick

walking the floor in his bedroom, to Nora picking up the *Herald Express* the fact that Mrs. Campbell was gone meant nothing, except perhaps a bit of relief.

To Margaret, lying trembling, it meant a good deal. It meant that Mrs. Campbell was on her way home, for the girl knew that she had no other patients that evening. Home somewhere, Margaret didn't know where. But home, and when Mrs. Campbell got there she would take off her uniform. . . . She would, wouldn't she? Or she might leave it on until she undressed for bed—but eventually it would come off, and Mrs. Campbell would find the message in her right-hand pocket.

Margaret wished she could have explained more in the message, but she hadn't the time. She wished, too, she could have remembered Paul Devlin's address, but she couldn't in the closet, undressing and writing the few words at the same time, and hunting for some money which she thought she had left in a sweater pocket.

She could remember Carol Mayo's apartment house, though, without looking it up. She couldn't forget that. She could hear Larry say, "Why, she lives in the Seymour Apartments—right around the corner from the Talbots."

The light over Margaret's bed was out, but a bridge lamp was on above the chair where Nora was reading the paper. The girl heard the paper crackle as Nora unfolded it slowly, sheet by sheet. A silence for a while, as Nora read, then a crackle, then another silence.

"Well!" Nora said suddenly. Then again. "Well!"

She looked toward the bed, but Margaret apparently was asleep, and hadn't heard her. She read the item on the society page once more—it was buried in a column of chatter.

Because she couldn't believe it, she turned to the vital statistics and searched out the column "Intentions to Marry." There she found what she was looking for nearly at the top of the column—"Jessica Reynolds, 26; Paul Devlin, 31. Los Angeles."

She stared at the two names for a long time. She was still seeing them in her mind when she folded the paper neatly and put it on the table beside her. Her knitting was there, too, but she didn't take it up.

Tonight she didn't feel like knitting, which was unusual for Nora. She felt only like sitting and wondering what it meant, Devlin and Mrs. Reynolds, and what difference that marriage would make to her and to Sam and to Nick. Margaret she had always disregarded, Larry, too, when he was alive.

Margaret had difficulty seeing what time it was, even though the clock on her night stand had a luminous dial and hands. She did make it out finally, though, and when she did, settled back somewhat relieved. "Quarter of eight. She'll be home now, and maybe taking off her uniform, looking in the pocket."

Mrs. Campbell was at home and she was eating her dinner in her kitchen, but she was still wearing her uniform. She hadn't yet looked in the pocket. By eight-twenty she was finished, and by eight-thirty her few

dishes were done and she was going into her bedroom. She was tired, for her day had been a hard one.

She unbuttoned the white uniform that had been freshly starched and clean when she had put it on in the morning, and threw it on the bed. Automatically, because it was going to the laundry the following day with others of its kind, she went through the two pockets. Sometimes she left a handkerchief or a receipt in them. Once, she had left a ring there.

When she saw the brooch pinning a bill and a bit of paper, she put on her glasses, because she was getting to the age where her eyes were not so good for close reading.

A ten-dollar bill, a small diamond brooch, and this note which she could hardly read or understand. Finally, she took it into the living room and spread it out on the table.

"Please, Mrs. C., do this for me. Take this address right away to Carol Mayo, Seymour Apartments, Clifford Street, Los Angeles. The address is 1649 Minor Street, Apt. 150. She'll know about it. And say nothing about this to anyone, not even to me. M.H.O."

At least those were the words that Mrs. Campbell made out. M.H.O.—that must be young Mrs. Oliver, but Mrs. Campbell couldn't remember when she had put the note and bill and the brooch in her pocket. Besides, what was all the secrecy about?

Why, if Mrs. Oliver had something for her to do,

didn't she ask her openly? It wasn't like her to be secretive about anything.

Mrs. Campbell was tired out and it was a quarter to nine. She was also undressed. Clifford Street was near Western, and she was six miles from there on the lower fringe of Beverly Hills.

Maybe Ellen would do it for her. Ellen, the landlady's daughter, nineteen, was willing to do the errand and take Mrs. Campbell's car to do it. So the masseuse gave the girl two dollars, the key to the car, and the Minor Street address, which she had copied on a plain white card.

"For Carol Mayo, Seymour Apartments," she told Ellen. "Just give her the card, that's all. No message, and, if she isn't there, slip it into her mail box or under her door. Anywhere that she'll see it."

Ellen was pleased with her errand, more than pleased that she could have a car in which to do it, because she didn't have much chance to drive. She would go immediately to Miss Mayo's, and then on the way back home, she could make several calls. Mrs. Campbell would not know the difference. She had told the girl simply to drive the car into the garage when she got back, put the keys in her mail box, because she was going to bed.

Miss Mayo probably was some middle-aged friend of Mrs. Campbell's. If she was home, all right, and if she wasn't, all right. Ellen hoped Miss Mayo wouldn't be home, because then she could be on her way for her calls.

Miss Mayo was at home, however. She answered the door herself, and she wasn't middle-aged. She was a pretty, dark-haired girl, about the same age as Ellen. "Miss Mayo?" Ellen asked.

"I'm Miss Mayo," the girl replied.

Well, if she was Miss Mayo, there was nothing to do but to give her the card.

"I was to give you this," Ellen said, thrusting out the card, and turning to leave.

But she didn't get very far, when Miss Mayo called. "What's this?"

"I was to give you this card. That's all. Just give it to you and go. If you weren't in, I was to leave it." Ellen stood puzzled a few feet from the door. She wished Mrs. Campbell had been more explicit because Miss Mayo seemed to be as puzzled as she was about it.

"Who sent it?"

"Mrs. Campbell."

"And who is Mrs. Campbell?"

"Mrs. Campbell is a masseuse who lives in my mother's flat building."

"Oh—"

Ellen thought from the way she said that that Miss Mayo understood so she hurried on down the hall to the elevator.

Carol went inside, and laid the card on the table. A strange way to advertise, sending a card around at nine-thirty at night. She might have been in bed asleep. Besides, if the girl hadn't explained that Mrs. Campbell

was a masseuse, she would have been as much in the dark as she had been when the card was handed to her with only an address on it.

She had never had a massage, never even thought about having one, and probably never would. Mrs. Campbell was wasting her cards on her.

She sat down at the table and resumed what she had been doing when the door bell rang. The card was near the paper on which she was writing a note of resignation to Paul Devlin, but she had pushed it away from her mind.

This was the fourth note she had written, the fourth but not the last, she decided, as she reread her own handwriting. "Mr. Devlin, I find I'm not happy in your office any longer, so I would like to resign."

Terrible, terrible, terrible . . . worse than the others, because it was the truth. The three that had preceded it had been patent lies, the first explaining that her mother was ill and she was needed at home; the second, that she herself was ill and no longer could continue her work; the third, that she had a chance to go to New York, and the opportunity was so great that she couldn't let it go by.

"Mr. Devlin, I find I'm not happy in your office any longer, so I would like to resign—"

A touch of the truth, but not all of it. It should be: "Dear Paul, I thought I was brave enough to stay after your marriage to Mrs. Reynolds, but I'm not. I'm a coward. I can't bear to think of you with her, so I've

got to leave and leave right away. I can't stay another day."

That was more like it, but she couldn't say it, of course. She had to leave a formal note on Paul's desk in the morning, and when he called her in to ask her about it, which he would do, she knew him well enough for that, she had to reply as formally as her note.

If only she could stay on! If only she had no nerves, no emotions! If only her love was the kind that could endure the thought of Jessica Reynolds with him all the time.

They weren't married yet—they couldn't be married for two more days, unless they went to Yuma, which apparently they had no intention of doing, because Carol had especially asked Fred that morning. But Saturday they could be married, if they wanted to, and they both wanted to, according to Fred.

A quiet wedding, Fred said. He was going, and a few friends of Jessica's. No one else. Where it would be and when it would be, he didn't know. No honeymoon because Paul was busy on the case, but as soon as the case was over they were going to Honolulu for a trip.

Horrible, having to get all her information from Fred, horrible, having to prod him to find out about them. Work around first until they were the subject of conversation and then ask a question which Fred probably thought innocent but which was not. A question that was so vital to her.

Well, she couldn't stand it any longer. Tomorrow,

by noon, she would be out of the office, and in the afternoon on her way home.

It was running away, but she couldn't help it. She wouldn't like going back home, either, and staying for several months, trying to forget Paul, and pretending to her mother that she needed a rest, and her mother reading through her love and her heart.

Still it was a choice of going home and being wretched or staying on with Paul and being even more wretched.

Carol tore up the last note. In the morning when she got down to work she would try another and see what she could do with it. She'd get down early, have her resignation on Paul's desk before he came in, and have her own desk in shape so she could leave. Not that Paul would care.

The torn bits of paper in her hands, she let her eyes wander over the table. They lit on the white card and stopped suddenly at "1649 Minor Street."

Familiar, some way, Minor Street. Minor Street, Minor Building—what was in Minor Building?

Because her mind was still dwelling on the morrow, her associations with Minor Street didn't come right away, so she sat looking at the card, a slight frown on her face, her fingers tearing the bits of paper into smaller bits.

Then it came. The Minor Building was where the Foster Derrick School of Art was located, and Jessica Reynolds went to the Derrick School. Carol had been by the school several times, drawn there by the fact that

Jessica attended it. Once on a Sunday, when she was riding with a friend and had asked him to take her to Tenth and Minor, and another time, also a Sunday, by herself.

So the masseuse had her offices in the Minor Building. This masseuse who advertised so peculiarly—who put no name on her cards, only scribbled an address.

Carol dropped the bits of paper and went to the shelf where her telephone book was. She turned to the C's, but there was no Campbell located on Minor Street or in the Minor Building. Plenty of Campbells, columns of them, but only two listed as masseuses, and each of them was many blocks from the Minor Building.

Because she was curious to know the exact number of the Derrick School of Art, she looked for it and found it was 1629 Minor Street.

"Sixteen forty-nine Minor street, apartment 150," on one side of the white plain card. Nothing on the other side. Written in lightish-blue ink.

Mrs. Reynolds' school at 1629; this address, 1649 Minor; the strange girl she had never seen before handing her the card.

"Of course there's no connection, no connection at all. Fred would laugh at me and Paul would be furious, but the card is so queer and the circumstances so queer. There should be a name on the card, even a written name would be enough and there isn't a name. Only an address. It's only because the Derrick school is so close that I'm suspicious. If the Derrick school were not so

near, I wouldn't think anything about it. I'd throw the card in the waste basket—"

She looked at her watch—it was ten-thirty. Pretty late to be starting out to see what 1649 Minor Street looked like. But if she didn't go, she argued to herself, she couldn't sleep anyway, wondering about it, thinking about it. She might as well go and get it over with. She didn't need to do anything but place the address, see what the house or buildings or whatever it was where Apartment 150 was located looked like.

After she had seen for herself, she could come home. If she thought there was anything suspicious about the place, she could tell Fred tomorrow, and he could do what he wanted to do about telling Paul. He would know better how to approach Paul than she would.

It took only a moment to slip into her coat and pull a hat down over her hair. The card she put in her purse. A new zest came over her as she stepped out into the chill night air. She'd take the bus, sit on the top in the wind, and after she had determined exactly what 1649 Minor Street was, and whether there was a Mrs. Campbell living there, she would treat herself to two orders of little thin hot cakes and syrup and butter.

"I wish you didn't have to go out tonight," Nora said to Nick as she went down the stairs with him. Margaret was sound asleep, so she could be left safely.

"Have to go. Nothing else to do. There are certain things I have got to get tonight."

"Nothing is going out?" By that, Nora meant money.

"No, but I don't know what we're going to do. Decide tonight, and let you know when I come back."

"You'll be back tonight?"

"Maybe and maybe not. Depends on whether everything is O. K. At any rate, don't do anything until about ten in the morning. I'll have word back to you by then. Don't like to leave you here with Margaret, but I need Sam."

"She's all right—much better now. By tomorrow, she'll be fine. But she can't stay here, Nick. You know that. It's too hard on all of us. She isn't one of us, she never has been. We won't be able to do anything with her, now that Larry is gone—I mean what he did. She'd always do anything he said. She's got to go—somewhere."

"I was thinking perhaps you and she could go on a boat trip, Nora. I'd miss you, but there's no one else who can go with her. I don't want her to go back to her family—not yet, anyway. In the next couple of days, we're all going away for a vacation. Just where we're going I don't know. I'll make arrangements for some lodge up in Oregon or Washington tomorrow, some place on the ocean, I think. I've already wired Lister to come from New York. He's about Larry's size. We'll take him with us, and we'll lose Larry up there in the ocean, swimming, maybe. Got to be some explanation. Lister can get away and we'll be all right."

"That's the trouble with this social front. That's why I don't like it."

"Well, we're into it now, and we've got to keep on, if we're going to continue business. After the accident to Larry, you can take Margaret away, and I'll go some place. We'll break up for a while, and we'll get together later.

"When I see you tomorrow, I'll have everything doped out—just how we're to do everything. At any rate, we'll have to wait for Lister before we can go away for the holiday, because he's got to pose as Larry while we're going."

"If I had my way, we would have been out of this place this morning—and safe somewhere."

Nick said nothing more, but went to the kitchen which was not lighted, and through the kitchen to the back porch which was not lighted, either. He knew the garden well through which he had to go to the garden garage door, for he made the trip many, many times. Every stepping stone was familiar to him, and Sam would have left the door open.

It was ten feet to the garden door from the porch steps, with a high wall separating the garden from the driveway. Nick made no sound as he moved over the grass and slipped into the door. However, he had thrown a dark silk scarf over his collar and shirt front, and on his shoes were rubber soles.

In the garage he climbed into the back seat of the big sedan and settled down on the floor. Three minutes

later, Sam came from the library entrance, walked down the driveway to the big triple garage doors and slid one of them open. There were no words between the men as Sam pulled the car out of the garage. Nor were there any words when they struck Santa Monica Boulevard on their way to Los Angeles.

Sam knew what he was to do and so did Nick. Neither of them needed any words. Sam also knew that someone was following the big car, but he wasn't worried about that. He had thrown off his pursuers a good many times before. That was part of his job when he was driving Nick.

All he had to do was to get a break at a signal—even if it took half an hour to get the break. Spurt ahead of other cars, slide into a hole, slide across the street ahead of the other car—but at least three cars ahead of the other car, hurry along up the street, turn a corner and he was all right. That is, Nick was all right. Then Sam would say "Now!" and Nick would open the right-hand tonneau door and be out on the sidewalk in an instant; the big car only slowing down, not stopping.

That was the procedure. The occupant in the other car wasn't to know that Nick was in the tonneau and that Nick had been let out. So far, Devlin's operatives in the small Ford coupé hadn't known, and it was Sam's business that they shouldn't know.

When Nick was out of the car, he went his own way, and Sam went his, until he had to pick up Nick at a prearranged place—usually the next day. Lately, though,

he hadn't been able to pick up Nick—it was too dangerous, so Nick managed to get home by himself. He wasn't picking him up tonight nor tomorrow. Nick would find the way home himself.

Always Sam had to remember that he had to drive carefully, observe every traffic rule, especially when Nick was in the tonneau. No accidents, and no tickets. Their safety depended on that.

Tonight, the getaway was easy and Nick was left on the corner of Sunset just off Fairfax. There were other people on the same corner waiting for the bus, so he joined the group, his dark cap pulled down over his forehead, and a gray tweed topcoat he had donned in the car over his dark suit.

He bought a paper from the newsboy and read it until the bus came; when he sat down his face was buried in the paper. At Fifth and Hill he got off the bus, took a street car, still reading the same paper in the street car. Three blocks from Tenth and Minor he got off, after telling the conductor that it was a little chilly this evening.

He was positive he had not been followed.

But to be doubly sure, he stopped at the curb when he left the car and pretended to tie a shoe lace. While he was stooping he looked up and down the street, but could see no loiterers. Only one clerk was in the little cigar store where the street car stopped.

He took the walk to Tenth and Minor easily. There was no need to hurry. The topcoat he was wearing was

shabby enough, worn enough to be accepted in the neighborhood through which he was passing.

A policeman came along slowly, swinging his club and whistling to himself. His presence on the same sidewalk didn't bother Nick. Neither did it frighten Nick when the cop stopped him and asked for a match. Nick gave him a package considerately, and offered him a cigarette which the officer took. He took several, in fact.

Nick, however, didn't go down Tenth Avenue nor down Minor Street. He chose Eleventh, and when he got to the corner of Eleventh and Graves, he walked down Graves. In the middle of Graves street was an alley, which would lead him where he wanted to go.

There were only a few lights down the alley, one to his right as he went along, in the back room of a warehouse which faced on Tenth Avenue, and which adjoined the Minor Building. No lights on his left until he came to the Helena flats, and those on the second story.

His key was ready, he had had it in his hand for some time. There was another key on his ring which would fit the door of flat Number 150, but this key he was holding would unlock the back entrance of the Helena flats—the janitor's entrance, it was called. From it, he would go up three stairs, past the little entry way, through another door, which was the corridor.

No one was in the alley. Nick made sure of that before he put his key in the lock. No person, he corrected

himself, only the black-and-white cat which had a habit of prowling at night.

The cat was rubbing against his legs now, mewing softly. To whom it belonged Nick didn't know, but ever since he had been coming to the Helena flats, it had met him every night he had come. Never missed once, he thought as he turned the key in the lock. Never saw the animal in the daytime, only at night.

Sometimes, when Nick opened the door, the cat slithered in, too, but where he went again Nick didn't know.

This time, the cat went in with him and promptly disappeared.

In the entry way, Nick got out his watch and looked at it. Quarter after eleven. Jessica would be here soon, if she could get away on time.

He pushed the swinging door that gave into the corridor, and turned abruptly to the right for his door was only two feet away from the entrance.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The neighborhood was not a prepossessing one at night. Although the street lamps were as bright as they were in her own district, yet to Carol they seemed dimmer. The night was very dark, and very lonely as she walked along, slowly now, because she had begun to be afraid.

In the daylight, her trip would not have been so bad, but at night and alone—several times she halted and wondered whether she should go back, forget the strange girl who had left the strange card, and leave the whole business up to Fred Taggart in the morning. Certainly that would be the easiest way.

She didn't turn back, however, she kept on, wishing the three blocks from the street car were only one.

It was nothing dangerous she was doing, she told herself. Simply going to see who lived in Apartment 150. A look at the apartment building, a look at the mail boxes—there would be mail boxes with names on them —there were every place. When she found out the tenant, she would go right home. Perhaps she would even take a taxi. Yes, she would, although she really couldn't afford one.

So few people on the streets—she would have felt so much better, so much safer, in a crowd. A woman

ahead of her hurrying, almost running, a big bag in her left hand. No one behind her, and no one she could see across the street.

The woman turned into a flat building and Carol had the sidewalk to herself. Her heels clicked distressingly on cement—there was no comfort in their tap, tap, tap. They seemed too loud, too noisy for the quiet neighborhood.

A few cars rushed past, but they weren't comforting, either, because they were going too fast. Going home she thought. That was where she should be.

At Tenth and Minor she came to the Minor Building, and looked up at the second-story windows.

The windows were dark, but she knew what the white card on one of them read. Not really white in the daytime and the sunlight, but a yellowed old white burned from sun and age. At night it was very white, though. Foster School of Art.

She stopped before the entrance and looked above the door to see if the address checked with the telephone book. It did. On the curb in front of the entrance were several large cans of trash waiting to be taken away in the early dawn. Through the glass entrance door of the building which gave the Foster Art school its egress, she could see nothing, because there were no lights.

Farther on, she came to the alley and then to the Helena apartments.

The number was as faded and weathered as the name

of the building above it, but it was the right number. All the way out from her home, she had been doubtful about the number—whether there was one at all. Whether her evening would be wasted and the mystery of the card deeper than ever.

She looked past the alley back to the Minor Building, and then to the second story of the Minor Building. Was it simply a coincidence that the school was so close? That was what Paul would say. That was what Fred would say.

Carol didn't know. She hoped not. She hoped that this Helena flat building was in some way connected with the school and Jessica.

"Well, here I am," she said to herself, but it seemed that she was uttering the words aloud.

A faint light was burning inside the glass-paneled door, but it was bright enough so that the girl could see dimly the entrance hall and in the darkness beyond what seemed to be a corridor. And some mail boxes inside the door to the left.

The door might be locked—it wasn't. She hardly touched the knob when it slid back, and she was in the entry, stumbling over the frayed mat and thankful that she didn't have to come home night after night to a place like this.

First, she thought it was the damp acrid smell that depressed her so. Then she knew it was the place which must have been a home for so many years for so many people, people who didn't want to make it their

home, and yet who had to. People who came and went without a thought of a home.

For the small light did not erase any of the shabbiness, or the carelessness, or the neglect of the Helena. Once it might have been bright and new, the paint fresh and clean, the carpets shining. Now it sagged, inside as it did outside. "I don't care," it might have been saying.

Even the mail boxes didn't care, twenty-four mail boxes, eight in a row and three tiers. Some of them were broken, the shields dropping down. All of them were tarnished, although they must have once been clean polished brass. How the postman found the proper boxes Carol didn't know.

Some of them were numbered and some of them were not. A few were closed and locked, and had fairly neat name cards in small glass slides, but 150 was not one of these. It was entirely missing from the cases. Carol went over the numbers carefully several times, but could find no box containing that number.

She counted five boxes unnumbered and unnamed.

No wiser than she had been when she started out, unless she looked from door to door, for the doors were all numbered. The door at her right across from the mail box held the number "101," and under the number, a card which read, "Manager. Inquire here for vacancies."

The door beyond that of the manager she could not see well on account of the bad light. She was stepping

across the corridor away from the mail boxes, when the door of 101 opened, and a woman stepped out.

"Looking for someone, Miss?" She was middle-aged and very large.

"I was looking for Mrs. Campbell in one hundred and fifty—but I don't see her name on the box—"

"No Mrs. Campbell here at all. I'm the manager and I know all the tenants. Hasn't been a Mrs. Campbell here for a good while. Maybe four years. When she was here, she didn't occupy one hundred and fifty. She was upstairs. I can't remember the number."

"I was told that I'd find her in one hundred and fifty." Carol grew a little bolder. Perhaps the manager would tell her who was in one hundred and fifty. The manager did.

"Well, she's not there. Mr. Rhodes is there, and he's been there for a long time. You weren't looking for a flat, were you? I've got several vacancies. Nice places, couldn't find better ones in town for the money. Six dollars a week is what I get."

Carol said she wasn't looking for a flat but would remember the price. Perhaps later. The manager popped back into her own flat and the girl was left alone in the hall.

Mr. Rhodes occupied number 150, whoever Mr. Rhodes was . . .

It was her curiosity again that took hold of her when she was outside the entrance door on the sidewalk. Nothing but her curiosity. But it made her push open

the glass door again, step past the mail boxes, past the little cubicle which was called a lobby but which was no more than a small square set in front of the door.

It brought her to the corridor which was merely a narrower extension of the lobby. A long passage, which had been carpeted decently once, and still was carpeted, but with the same original material, much worse for years and wear, the wear being supplemented in the bad spots with small rubber mats thrown down carelessly.

The doors flanking the hall on both sides were the worse for wear and age, too, and when the light from the lobby faded out Carol had no way to make out what the numbers were until she came to a break at the far end and saw another light to the left.

The left-branching corridor was a short one, much shorter than the right, but she found what she wanted, the second door from the turn. Number 150.

She knew the position of Number 150, anyway. She could go home. With a little sigh of relief she turned, but, as she turned a man slipped into sight. One moment, he was not there. The next, he was . . .

It was Nick Oliver!

Carol's next clear realization was that she was in that room 150. With Nick. And the door was shut. She was looking up at him, her eyes wide with fear, from the couch where he had flung her. He was standing above her, a gun in his hand.

"How did you get here?" he demanded in a low voice.

The girl drew her eyes away from his to the gun.

"Mr. Devlin sent me," she lied, and wondered how she could have had an answer so promptly when she was so frightened. Yet the words had come so easily. "Mr. Devlin sent me," she repeated. She hoped Nick would believe her—it was her only chance.

He didn't, she saw at once from the smile that curled his lips.

"Mr. Devlin sent you at eleven-thirty at night—alone? I suppose he's out waiting for you to report. I suppose his men are outside, and he sends a girl in here. Afraid to come in himself—that's it, isn't it?"

Carol said nothing, but her eyes didn't leave the gun. It was more ominous than Nick's eyes. The first time in her life she had ever looked into the muzzle of a gun.

"It's loaded," Nick explained sarcastically, "and it's one of those guns that don't make much sound when they shoot. A putt that's more like the pop of a cork out of a bottle. Ever hear of a silencer? Well, this gun's got a silencer on it, and I'm going to use the gun if you make one unnecessary noise, or do anything that I ask you not to do. Understand that?"

Neither did the girl reply to this. Nick in an uglier voice repeated his last two words. "Understand that?"

Carol nodded. She understood. She understood everything. A few minutes ago she had been outside the door and now she was inside, looking at the muzzle of Nick's gun. Fearing it, because she had every right to fear it. She didn't doubt in the least that Nick would shoot her if he chose to. She didn't doubt that the gun

was equipped with a silencer. Nick would be safe shooting her—

No one in the world knew that she was in the flat which must be the headquarters of Nick's counterfeiting gang. She corrected herself immediately on that—no one but the person who had sent her the ambiguous card.

Had it been sent purposely to trap her? She thought not. Nick's surprise on seeing her had been too evident. That one flash of surprise—she never had seen anything quite like it before in her life. That instant of surprise—she as surprised as he was, but he had recovered himself first.

That was the tragedy of it. He had recovered himself first, and now she was with him inside the door. That was one of the things that she couldn't understand, when she could grasp everything else so clearly. How she had got behind the door into the flat.

She could remember little about it because it had happened so quickly. The last thing she remembered in the dimly lighted corridor was the flash of surprise on Nick's face changing to something else—what she didn't know. Then the grip of Nick's arms around her, then she was inside, and the door was shutting and she was falling on the couch.

Her shoulder ached, a reminder of that grip which had been so quick and so savage. Her right shoulder, and her left arm.

Nick was moving away from her to a table by the

window. He was opening the drawer of the table and taking out something with his left hand. His right hand was holding the gun, and he was facing her.

Carol found out soon enough what he was groping for in the drawer for when he came toward her again, he was holding some stout cord in his hand.

"Not a sound out of you!"

She didn't say anything. She couldn't. She let him tie her wrists behind her—he finished the job swiftly, and when it was done he lifted up her feet and put them on the couch. He wasn't holding the gun as he tied her ankles, neither had he been holding the gun when he tied her wrists but it was only an inch away from his right hand on the arm of the couch.

She did speak, though, when he took a great square of black silk from his coat pocket and started to tie it around her mouth.

"You don't have to do that—" she mumbled, her voice lost in the silk.

He went right on tying, however, and when he finished, took up his gun and returned it to his pocket.

Carol watched him as he moved around the room. First he went to the door, opened it, looked in the corridor and stooped to pick up something. When he closed the door again, he was carrying Carol's hat which had fallen off in the hall and her bag.

He put the hat on the table, and sat down to look over the bag. Quickly he pulled out everything that it contained, her compact, her lipstick, two handker-

chiefs, her coin purse, a little box of aspirin, a memorandum book—and the card. He looked at the card for a long time, and then he looked at the girl for a long time.

Such a simple card, but it seemed to disturb Nick as much as it had her. Before he slipped it into his vest pocket, he turned it over and over a dozen times, peering now on the blank side, now on the side where the address was written.

She expected him to ask her something about it, but he didn't. When the card was in his pocket, he opened a door which she saw led into a kitchen and went in there. From the couch, she could see the edge of the old worn stove, and the sink, with cupboards above it, nothing else.

Nick she didn't see, because he was to the right of the stove. She heard him, though, he was pulling something out on the floor, and whatever he was pulling was scraping the linoleum. Now he was opening a lock with a key. She could hear the key in the lock, hear the lock click, and the jar of the lid as it was lifted.

She didn't move on the couch. She stayed very quiet, even her breathing was quiet because she wanted to hear what he was doing. The cords on her ankles and wrists burned into her flesh, and the gag was uncomfortable.

But whatever Nick was doing, he was doing quietly, so after a while she turned her eyes from the open kitchen door to the room in which she was.

Not a large room, and a room badly and barely fur-

nished. The couch she was lying on was old. She could feel the broken springs under her. The chair near it was old, too, a wooden rocker covered with shabby denim; a scarred table, a smoking stand of iron, another chair, all wood, straight-backed; a faded, once-flowered rug on the floor—worse near the window where the sun had brushed its worn pile. Brownish liver-colored walls.

Far different from the Oliver home on Roxmore Drive, and yet Nick seemed to be at home in it. He seemed to fit here, in the same manner that he fitted the place he called home. He moved about the flat in a familiar manner.

Four doors in the room where Carol was; the open kitchen door, the closed corridor door, and two others. One was near the couch back of her. Near the knob of this was a stout padlock which was fastened. The padlock didn't look new.

The other door was to the right of the couch, near one of the windows. It was closed, but had no padlock on it. Carol thought it might lead into a bedroom.

Was this the place Paul had been searching for so many months? This? So close to the school where Jessica went? Across the alley from the school . . .

She was searching for something else in the living room, too, but couldn't find it. A telephone. It might be in the bedroom which she couldn't see or the kitchen, or behind the padlocked closet. That was a closet, wasn't it?

Nick came through from the kitchen, past the couch. "Comfortable?" he drawled, giving her a sharp look.

Carol's eyes followed him as he went to the door which did prove to be a bedroom's. She saw a little more of it than she could see of the kitchen.

She saw a bed, dresser and one end of what seemed to be a chest. Nick, however, was rummaging around in the closet for something. Moving a box, much as he had done in the kitchen, unlocking it . . .

Where was the counterfeiting equipment? You needed a press, didn't you? You needed a stock of paper? Where was the press? And the paper? In the kitchen where Nick had been fussing with something? In the bedroom closet where he was now occupied?

Carol's curiosity had pushed her fear away. The fear, though, came back with a rush, when she heard a key in the lock of the hall door, heard the knob turn, saw Nick rush from the bedroom into the living room.

"I'm early, darling," the slim tall youth who came in announced in a feminine voice, "but I managed it beautifully—why—"

"We have a visitor." This from Nick as he took a step toward the tall slim youth. "Recognize her? Carol Mayo."

Jessica Reynolds and Carol Mayo stared into each other's eyes, for Mrs. Reynolds was the tall slim youth. She looked like a handsome boy in her masculine clothes.

Jessica was by far the calmest of the three. She seated herself on the rocker, and let it move under her

slowly and rhythmically. She lighted a cigarette slowly, unruffled, and quietly smoked it, flipping the ashes on the floor as she smoked. And she looked at Carol and the girl saw the hatred in her eyes, hatred even which her elaborate calm couldn't conceal.

She listened without a word while Nick told her what had happened, how he had found Carol in the hall, how he had taken her in. Nick's voice rose now and then as he spoke, with excitement. Jessica barely glanced at the card Nick showed her—the card he had taken from Carol's purse.

She was still wearing her cap, a light-gray tweed cap, the peak pulled far down on her forehead, but she wasn't wearing the gloves she had on when she had come into the room. She had pulled them off easily and deliberately when she sat down—a pair of gray wash-leather gloves. On her fingers were no rings—not even the engagement ring Paul had given her, which Carol had picked out.

Her trousers were dark gray, none too carefully fitted, her coat a loose lighter-gray sport coat, and under it she wore a dark-blue sweater with a crew neck. There was no makeup on her face, but her face had lost none of its beauty from the lack of makeup. Under her cap and over her hair she had a brown wig.

"I was going to wait until you came," Nick said, when he put the card back in his vest pocket.

Jessica nodded, and blew a ring of smoke up toward the brownish ceiling. "The car's on Temple. Don't

you think you'd better get it and bring it here right away? We can't stay here—with her." She had taken her eyes from Carol and was looking at Nick.

"I'd like to get Sam. I need him—"

"Haven't time to get Sam."

"I could get him here at the most in forty minutes—and I may need help."

"In forty minutes we'll be on our way with Miss Mayo. Besides, I'm here to help you. And there isn't a moment to lose, Nick."

Even as she said this, Jessica made no move to get up. She drew slowly on her second cigarette, taking deep breaths between draws. She sat with eyes half-shut while Nick took up his cap which he had put on the table beside Carol's hat.

"Make it as soon as you can, but don't take one chance, Nick," she said as he reached the door. "I'll have everything ready when you get back."

"You have a gun?"

"I have. Now go along."

When the door closed softly after Nick, she got up from the chair, went to it and bolted it. Then she tossed her cigarette into the tray in the iron stand, turned to Carol and said, "Well."

There was a world of sarcasm, of hatred in that one word. Carol didn't miss any of the shadings. The same fear came over her when Jessica said that one word that had come over her when she was looking in the muzzle

of Nick's gun, although Jessica held no gun, and made no move to get one out.

"I don't care where you got that card, Carol Mayo. The card doesn't mean a thing in the world to me." She snapped her fingers. "What I do know, though, is that you're going to be awfully sorry that you let your curiosity get the better of you.

"Curiosity is a bad thing, especially for a girl as young as you are. Paul doesn't know where you are, and he isn't going to find out. And it isn't going to do you any good to tell me you know he's coming here, because he isn't.

"At the present time, he's playing poker with some friends of mine, and he's going to play until two o'clock, because that's when the game usually breaks up.

"And I'm supposed to be playing bridge at the same party, and I'm going to be back at two. He would never know I've been gone, because I got away in a caterer's truck through the kitchen."

Carol moved uncomfortably, and the cords cut deeply into her wrists. The cords on her ankles were not so bad—they were more loosely tied. The silk gag over her mouth was suddenly stifling, and she tried to open her lips in an effort to get it off, but she couldn't. Nick had fastened it too well.

Into her nostrils came the smell of the black dye in the silk, and the damp heavy odor of the room—and another smell of fresh lilacs which was only too familiar to the girl. Every time Jessica came into the office, she

came wafting that scent. After she left the scent stayed for some time, and sometimes when Jessica was not present, when Carol was only talking to her on the telephone, she smelled fresh lilacs.

Whether Jessica really had the perfume on tonight, Carol didn't know. The scent she caught might only have been suggestion, but it seemed very real to the girl —as real as if Mrs. Reynolds had sprayed herself thoroughly with the essence of lilac.

But over everything, over her fear which was very great, over her danger which she knew, too, must be very great, over the little things that made her so uncomfortable, over the smells that were so disturbing, there was the great triumph she felt. A vast surging triumph that at times made her forget her danger and her fear.

She had been right! Right all the time, and Paul and Fred had been wrong. Jessica was one of the gang. Perhaps Paul would never know, but she knew, and that knowledge made up for so much disappointment, so much despair.

There was a sense of failure, too, mingled with her triumph, that her knowledge had to remain with herself—that there was no one to share it with—no Paul, no Fred to say that she was right and they were wrong.

But she couldn't think too much about the failure; she couldn't think too much about anything except the now, the here, the present. With that, her triumph

fell away and her fear came spinning back, making her head buzz, the nerves in her body quiver.

What Jessica and Nick were going to do with her, she didn't know, of course. She knew nothing except what she had heard—that Nick was going for a car that was kept somewhere on Temple Street, and that when he came back they were going. Whether they meant all three of them, or only Jessica and Nick, she didn't know, either. Jessica apparently planned to be back at her party at two . . .

If she could keep her mind on the present, on the now, she was all right. When she thought of the future, even an hour ahead in the future, the room turned as black as the handkerchief over her mouth, and then black to bright crimson.

She watched Jessica go to the door back of the couch, take a key from a ring and unlock the padlock. She saw a light turn on in the closet, for it was a closet, but she couldn't see much of it, a few clothes hanging on hooks, and something on the floor that looked like a big ice box.

Jessica was on her knees before the box opening it, taking something from it, putting what she was taking in something Carol couldn't see. There was a click now and then of metal on metal, and when Mrs. Reynolds came from the closet she had a small brown leather suitcase in her hand which she put on the floor near the door.

The next trip Jessica made was to the bedroom, and

she came from there after a few moments with another suitcase, much the same size as the first. Both of them were nondescript suitcases, and both of them side by side near the door.

"That's done," Mrs. Reynolds muttered to herself, dusting off her hands.

Apparently that was all she was going to do, for she sat down after that in the same chair she had occupied when she had first come into the room; sat down, took a cigarette from her pocket, lighted it slowly with a lighter, and started to smoke and to rock.

After she had finished her cigarette, she walked to the iron tray, crushed it out and then walked to the bedroom. Carol saw her standing by the curtained window. She seemed to be listening.

When she came back after perhaps five minutes, she took Carol's hat from the table, went to the couch and put it on the girl's head. Then she picked up Carol's purse from the table, and sat down again on her chair, the purse in her lap.

Carol was sure that she was going—wherever Nick and Jessica were going. She had her hat on and Jessica was holding her purse . . . She was sure, too, that in the suitcases near the door were the plates from which Nick and Jessica made the money. The plates Paul thought were so important for him to have. The plates were ready to go, too.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

At twelve-thirty exactly, a call came for Devlin and took him away from the poker table. He threw down his hand immediately, told Graham, his host, and one of Jessica's oldest friends in Los Angeles, to count him out and left the room and his growing stack of winnings on the table.

It was Fred Taggart calling.

"Burke just phoned that someone is taking the car from the garage on Temple Street. I told him to go through as we instructed him and we'd be right out. His car is in the driveway according to orders."

"Get here as fast as you can, and pick me up. I want you with me. You know the address?"

Fred knew it and the connection was broken. Fred always knew where to reach his chief, for when Paul was out his messages were relayed to Fred.

Paul didn't stop for his hat, neither did he go out the front door of the Graham home. He slipped out the back door, through the kitchen, and from there around the driveway to the front, thinking as he went that if everything went right, Fred should be riding by in five minutes—because the traffic was light.

He was pleased, too, that after a month someone should be wanting to use that car on Temple Street.

That someone, he hoped, would be Nick Oliver.

Paul had known about the garage on Temple Street for exactly one month when one of his men had trailed Nick there. That day Nick had not been driving a car from his home, but a shabby Ford sedan, deceptive in looks because the engine was in perfect condition. Paul had examined the car and the engine himself, also the white slip on the wheel of the car.

The license was issued from Sacramento to a man of Nick's description, but with the name of Dick Jones. As Dick Jones he had rented a garage on Temple Street from the owners of a duplex some six months before Paul's men had caught up with him.

As Dick Jones, his story in renting the garage had been a simple one, that he lived in the neighborhood, that he needed another garage for a second car. That he wouldn't bother much, but his wife might come occasionally to the garage when he was using her car. In the seven months he had had the garage, which was back of the duplex and entered by a narrow driveway from the street, the owners never had seen his wife, and they had seldom seen Mr. Jones.

But his rent arrived promptly on the first of each month, a crisp five-dollar bill in an envelope with his name in the left-hand corner. They had never had such a thoughtful tenant for their garage.

Neither had they ever had such a thoughtful tenant about the place for the second duplex—they lived in one

themselves—as they had had this past month in Mr. Burke, who was home all day long and willing to help in the garden or do anything they wanted him to do. Mr. Burke was a bachelor and an exemplary man.

It was too bad that there was no garage for Mr. Burke's car, and they didn't mind in the least if he left it in the driveway. He was so quick to move it away when they were coming out of the garage, dropping everything he was doing, that they were sorry he had to be inconvenienced. When Mr. Jones gave up his garage—Mr. Burke should have it, at no extra cost.

So Burke's car was left all the time, blocking the driveway. It was part of Paul's plan to trap Nick, for Burke was one of his men and he was working on the theory that Nick would need the shabby Ford sedan some day in a hurry.

All Devlin wanted was time when Nick came for his car. Burke would warn him and with his car blocking the driveway, he could delay Nick long enough to give Paul a chance to get to the Temple Street garage before their suspect could get away. When they got there they were simply going to follow him.

For four weeks, Paul had been waiting word that the Ford sedan was being used, for he had been lucky enough to find one of the duplexes unrented and had been able to put Burke in there almost immediately on his discovery.

The blocking had been done nicely, cleverly, he

thought. From the street you couldn't see Burke's car. You came on it when you walked up the driveway, and there it stood parallel to the two small garages, and at night to make the deception even better, Burke covered it with a canvas.

Nick could not be suspicious of a car swathed in canvas, and if he had to get out his Ford sedan, he would first have to move Burke's car, which was locked and braked.

To have Burke's car moved, Nick would have to call on the owners, and that would bring Burke out of the house with an offer to help. If Nick wanted his Ford badly enough, he had to accept Burke's help, and Burke would stall as long as he dared.

Fred came whizzing by and Paul jumped in. He had arrived in four minutes to the dot. Another seven, and they should be on Temple Street. They were there in six and one-half minutes, but not in front of the duplex. Fred stopped half a block away and put out the lights of his car.

After that they waited, their ears alert to every sound, and the sound they were waiting for came at last, a welcome sound. It was the rumble of a car backing out of a driveway down the street, the driveway in which they were interested. Neither of them could see the car that came out very plainly, but Paul said tersely, "Coupé. Burke."

Fred didn't answer. In another moment, they heard

the sound of a second car backing out of the driveway. That was what they wanted, and both of them instinctively knew that the second car was the Ford sedan.

"Don't start until he's well down the street," Paul cautioned.

The second car was on the street and going ahead, its tail light a tiny red beam in the distance when Fred put his foot on the starter.

Three blocks away, the sedan turned abruptly to the left. Fred's coupé also took the left turn.

"Not too fast, Fred," Paul warned. "I want to keep as far behind him as we dare."

"Nick, I'd swear," Paul exclaimed after he had warned Fred again to be cautious and take his time.

There was nothing distinctive about the rear of the sedan. It was like the rear of thousands of other sedans of the same make, yet to Paul it was so entirely different that he could pick it out of thousands. Never did he lose sight of the red tail light, although the coupé kept well back from it.

Sometimes, Paul would order Fred to run down another street, and double back, when they were on a main boulevard, so sure he was that he could find the familiar light again, so eager was he that Oliver would not know he was being trailed.

Always he was right. They came on the car again, and shivers of relief came over Fred, and the same shiv-

ers over Paul, although he would not have admitted his relief, even to Fred.

"Obviously, he doesn't want to be followed," Paul remarked as the sedan took the twentieth turn it had made since the start at the Temple Street garage. "Ring around the rosy."

To Fred who was driving and obeying instructions, it was ring around the rosy. He didn't try to follow the sedan's tail light. That was up to Paul. He was driving, his mind on his car, handling it properly, carrying out Paul's orders. It wasn't the first time they had trailed a car together.

It was when the sedan turned down Graves Street from Eleventh Avenue that Paul laughed aloud. "I think we're at the end of our journey, Fred. Yes, we are! Stop here, quickly!"

He was out of the car before it had stopped, shutting the door quietly.

"Get to a phone, Fred, somewhere. I want four men right away. Meet you right there, at the mouth of that alley. See?"

Fred looked down the street and saw the alley in the darkness. He nodded.

"Oliver went down there, and stopped his car. You don't hear it any more, do you?"

"No—" Fred admitted.

"Get back as fast as you can. Tell the men—call Pinker first, you don't need to bother about phoning the others, Pinker will do it—tell the men to come to

the corner of Graves and Eleventh. And quickly, Fred. Time is valuable."

As Paul walked swiftly to the alley, his rubber-soled shoes made no sound. Fred started the car once more and backed it up to Eleventh.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Nick had lifted Carol in his arms and was carrying her to the door. Jessica was weighted down with the two suitcases, when a knock came at the door. Jessica put the suitcases back on the floor, and Nick tiptoed over to the couch and laid Carol down. Then all three of them looked at the door.

The knock came again, then a pounding. Then a voice.

"We know you're there, Oliver. Will you open up quietly? Devlin speaking. My men have the place surrounded."

Nick and Jessica remained perfectly quiet, although they were both tense. Carol was the only one of the three who moved. The sound of Paul's voice sent new hope through her, such a surge of hope as she had never had before.

She tried to call to him, but the only sound that came through the silken gag was something that resembled a moan. She tried to break the cord that bound her wrists with one violent movement, and only succeeded in falling from the couch to the floor with a thud that echoed dully through the room.

Nick glanced back at her, then at the door. Jessica didn't take her eyes from the door.

"You heard me, Oliver. I want the door opened, and opened quickly, or I'll shoot. But first, we're going to break the windows in the alley and throw in some tear bombs."

Jessica took a step toward Nick and her hand caught his. They looked into each other's eyes for a moment, and then both of them turned to Carol. Neither of them said anything, however. But Carol saw Nick nod slightly, and move up to the door.

"You're right, Devlin. I am here," he said, his lips close to the door. "But this time you're wrong, you're not going to shoot, and you're not going to pitch in any tear bombs. How do you like that?"

"This is my last warning, Oliver," Paul's voice came from the corridor. "And your last chance."

Carol knew what was coming even before Nick said it. The smirk that came to his lips told her, the tense fright that had changed suddenly to a tense confidence. The confidence spread through the still room, two people breathed it out, and the third, the bound girl on the floor, breathed it in, and the hope that had come over her when she heard Paul's voice left her.

She didn't try to struggle any more. She just lay, as quietly as she could—waiting for Nick's next words and in the time she was waiting, she knew how much, how terribly she had failed Paul this time.

"We have a friend of yours here, your secretary, I believe," Nick spoke through the door, and the smirk

on his lips slowly spread into a smile. "You wouldn't want her harmed, I'm sure."

"You're lying, Oliver, stalling. I haven't any time to waste and I've given you my last warning," came Paul's immediate answer.

"I'm not lying. Carol Mayo is here. She'll talk to you if you wish. Want to hear her voice?"

Jessica stooped beside Carol, pulled her into a sitting position and tore the gag from her mouth.

There was a silence from the corridor, and then Paul's voice, again.

"She isn't there and you know she isn't there!"

"Perhaps the young lady will speak for herself!"

Carol didn't want to speak, she had been telling herself that she wouldn't speak, that she couldn't be made to speak, that if she spoke she would fail Paul even more than she had done. And yet, when Nick looked over at her, the smile frozen on his face, and she felt Jessica's firm fingers gripping her arm, and heard Jessica's sibilant whisper, she did cry out.

"He's telling the truth! I am here! I—"

But that was enough for both Jessica and Nick. Mrs. Reynolds whipped the gag back on her mouth and Carol's eyes closed weakly.

A silence after this both in the corridor and in the room, a silence like slow water dripping against Carol's brain. Nick broke it finally.

"What are you going to do about it, Devlin? Like to consider my terms?"

"And I have done this to him," Carol thought. "I shouldn't have spoken. If I hadn't, he wouldn't be considering any terms that Nick might make. I've done this to him—"

"What are your terms, Oliver?"

"Let me get away. My car is right outside the bedroom window." Nick was speaking very fast, but very distinctly. "Call off your men for half an hour, that's all I need. Half an hour and Miss Mayo will be safe, I assure you."

"You'll leave her in the flat?"

"Naturally not. I'll take her with me, but when I'm safe away, I'll drop her and she'll be all right. My word as a gentleman."

"I'm not considering your word as a gentleman, Oliver."

"Those are my terms. All your men and yourself withdrawn for half an hour. No monkey business about it. I take Miss Mayo with me, and drop her out of the car some place. No designated place. Any monkey business and—well, I'm desperate now, Devlin. You've forced me to be desperate."

"Anybody with you besides Miss Mayo?"

"One man."

Carol opened her eyes and looked up at Jessica. There was a smile on her face, too, a confident smile, and the tense confidence in the room had increased a hundredfold.

"I'll have to think it over," came from Paul.

Jessica sat down on the rocker, and pulled out her cigarette case, but when she had a cigarette out and to her lips, she took it away, put it back into the case again, and the case in her coat pocket. She was not rocking now, but she was still smiling.

Nick was standing by the door, one hand on the wood panel, the other in his coat pocket, where his gun was.

"He won't do it," Carol said to herself. "He won't, and I won't blame him if he doesn't. Working so long, and here he has Nick—and Jessica, even if he doesn't know she's here. Both of them, and then—"

But in the midst of her thoughts came Paul's voice.

"You win, Oliver. I'm taking my men away. I'll give you half an hour, exactly half an hour. But I must have Miss Mayo returned to me alive. That's final. We'll use my time. Set your watch. Exactly one-fifteen. By one-twenty I'll have my men away, and you can start. One-twenty, and at one-fifty we start out."

"Thank you, Devlin." Nick turned away from the door, his watch in his left hand. "Ready?" he asked Jessica in a whisper.

"Ready," she whispered back. "What about the suitcases?"

"We'll have to leave them—"

There were sounds now in the corridor and in the alley. The feet of men moving away. Finally the sounds ceased, and Nick took his eyes from his watch.

"Now!" he said, and he picked Carol up in his arms and hurried with her to the bedroom. Jessica was before

him, pulling the blinds up, unlocking the window, pushing it up. But she wasn't the first out the window. Nick was, leaving Carol perched on the sill. Somehow, and very quickly Carol was dumped down to Nick, and then put into the front seat of the sedan. Jessica hurried in beside her.

As soon as Nick sat down he put his foot on the starter, and through the quiet alley came the noise of the motor.

"Watch the time," he said to Jessica who was beside him. "My watch is in my coat pocket."

"Where to?" she asked. "I don't trust Paul, Nick."

"Never mind that now. I thought we'd try the Ventura road—there's that shack of Davidson's in Hidden Valley."

"The girl's going with us, of course."

"Sure, she's going with us, but we've got to get rid of this sedan and pretty soon."

Jessica had a gun in her lap, her right hand was holding it, but it was not a relaxed hand. As the small dash light picked out the dull black handle, Carol felt that it was ready, any time to shoot. Jessica's finger was on the trigger.

There was a watch in her left hand, Nick's watch, the back nestled into the palm of her hand, and the face up so she could see what time it was. Carol kept looking from the white dial with the gold hands to the gun, and then ahead at the street.

She knew what time it was to the second and as she

kept looking at the watch constantly, she wondered why she was so interested in the time. She needn't be, because time didn't mean anything any more.

Jessica and Nick were not going to keep their part of the bargain with Paul. They were not putting her out of the car, they were taking her with them. Where they were taking her shouldn't matter, either, whether it was to some shack in Hidden Valley, or some other place.

No, the time shouldn't worry her, nor where she was going, but they both did.

Did Paul really expect Nick to keep his word? Was he counting on Nick's promise?

She kept listening for cars coming from behind. Now and then she did hear one and a thrill of joy passed over her, which was followed almost instantly by a feeling that chilled her very bones, and left her lips, under their gag, trembling.

When the car came ahead of them and passed them, for Nick was not driving very fast, she was glad and sorry, too, at the same time, for if the car had contained Paul's men—she didn't like to think about that, and yet she wanted to think of it, even if Jessica's gun was so ready.

"Time?" Nick asked occasionally, for he was not taking his eyes off the street.

Jessica would give it to him. Once Carol saw that she had been a minute fast in her calculation.

"I'm sure there's no one following," Nick said, when

he had turned up an alley and down again at the other end, and then two blocks on to another alley. "I'm certain."

"You're not heading for the Elite Garage?" Jessica's voice was strained.

"No, I thought I'd go by Rod's, and if his car is in front of the house as usual, I can pick it up. You can drive this one away—it's better than the Elite because there's only one man on duty at this time of night, and he'd remember me and the car."

The Elite was where Nick kept still another car, a coupé, under still another name than either Nick Oliver or Dick Jones. There he was known as Gene Murphy, and the car was registered in that name with a driver's license in the side pocket in that name, too, handy so he could get hold of it quickly.

"Have you a key to Rod's car?"

"Yes. Time?"

Jessica said it was one-forty-two.

The front seat was not crowded even with the three of them, for Jessica and Carol were slim. There was plenty of room. The side window was up, and Carol could lay her cheek against it if she wished. She did but felt no coolness from the glass because of the gag.

In the silence, she became conscious again that her wrists hurt her, her ankles, too. When she moved, the pain became worse, so she didn't stir much. She sat quite still and tense, every muscle in her body taut, every nerve in her body tight. Even her lungs, as she

breathed, felt tight and with the tightness came a pain that stabbed her chest.

"Don't worry, we'll get away." Nick turned the car swiftly down a side street and stopped suddenly.

"I'm not worrying, dear. I know we'll get away."

"Rod's is right around the corner. You stay here. I'll be back in a few minutes—"

His hand was on the door when a cool voice sounded from the sedan's tonneau.

"Right where you are, Oliver, I've got you covered!"

Paul!

Carol wanted to shout with happiness, with joy. Sudden tears welled up in her eyes, dropped on her cheeks, and on the silk gag, but she didn't even know she was crying, she didn't even feel the tears, nor hear the sobs that came to her throat, and were muffled by the handkerchief.

"I'll have your gun, Nick! Right now!" Paul was leaning over the seat, his head between the two of them. He picked up Jessica's gun from her lap, and took Nick's which was handed to him slowly. "Out of the car with you, both of you!"

Nick already had opened the door of the car, so he stepped out in the street. Paul opened the tonneau door and was beside him instantly.

Carol saw the two guns in his hands, and struggled again to break the cords, but couldn't.

"You, too, Jessica. Out here!"

Jessica slid out slowly as Nick had done, and when

she was standing beside Nick, Carol saw the shift of the gun Paul held in his right hand to his left hand, saw another lightning movement, and the next thing she heard was a slight tinkle of metal, then another and Nick and Jessica were handcuffed together. In the moonlight the steel flashed like silver, two cuffs, one of them on Jessica's left hand and the other on Nick's right.

"Over here!" Paul ordered. "No, Nick!"

Nick stepped closer to the car as Paul indicated, and there was another flash of steel and tinkle of metal, and Nick's left hand was handcuffed to the metal handrail on the back of the front seat.

It was then that Devlin dropped one of his guns in his pocket, and examined both Nick and Jessica for other weapons. Not a word had been said by the two. The T-man was the only one who spoke. When he spoke again, he addressed Carol.

"All right, Carol?" he asked, but he didn't look at her. He was still holding his gun in his right hand as he walked around the front of the car to the door where Carol was.

She couldn't answer him, but she knew what he was going to do. The gag came off first, not untied, because Paul had only one hand free, and his eyes were watching his two captives. The gag was pulled away from the girl's mouth, and around her neck.

"Oh," she said when it was off. "Oh—" Then she stiffened her arms behind her and she felt his hand on

hers, his warm flesh on her warm flesh. Only for a moment, though, and then her wrists were free and he was putting something in her lap. A knife.

"You can manage your ankles yourself."

Her wrists, even her fingers were numb as she picked up the knife. Once it fell on the floor of the car and when she found it, some feeling came back in her fingers, long prickles of pain, the blood rushing into her hands. She was longer at the job of cutting the bonds on her ankles than Paul had been with one hand, but finally they were cut and she was free.

"All right?" Paul asked again.

She could answer him now. "All right."

"Now I want you to drive us to the Federal Building. You in the front seat, Nick, Mrs. Reynolds and myself in the back seat. Think you can do it?"

"I can do it—" But after she said the words, she didn't know. Her legs seemed so numb. If she could walk a bit first, so her feet would be steady on the clutch, on the brake—

She did do it, although somehow, with the clanking of the handcuff fastened to Nick's left wrist and then to the metal rail of the tonneau in her ears the whole way, with the consciousness about her, within her, that Jessica and Paul were side by side, with the silence of the three behind her worse than their voices ever could have been.

In front of the Federal Building, four men surged

about the car as soon as she brought it to a stop. Fred Taggart was one of them.

"Take Carol home, Fred, right away, and get a doctor for her. The others will come with me. As soon as you see that Carol's all right, you may come back."

There were other orders, too, that Paul was giving but Carol didn't hear them. She didn't want to hear them, she didn't hear anything that Fred said on the way home, either, except what he said as he was helping her out of the car.

"I wonder what Paul thinks about Jessica now?"

Carol had been wondering that, too, all the time she was driving Nick's Ford sedan downtown . . . Paul's silence had been so frightening . . .

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

At first, Carol didn't know whether she'd open the door or not. Of course it was Fred—he'd said he was coming in the morning to see how she was. She let the bell ring twice before she got up from the couch and put her half-finished cup of coffee on the table.

But it was Paul she saw standing in the hall, Paul looking haggard, his face gray from fatigue.

"I came as soon as I could," he said, coming into the room. "I just got through." His eyes caught the cup on the table in front of the couch. "Would you have a cup of coffee for me? Haven't had a bite of breakfast."

Carol said she would get some—she was glad to get away, for Paul had completely taken her by surprise. When she entered the living room a little later with a plate of fresh crisp toast and a pot of coffee, she had control of herself again.

He ate the toast quickly and drank the coffee thirstily, demanded another cup, and when she poured that, drank it immediately. Then he put down his cup and leaned back with a deep sigh.

"Yes, it's over. I'm all through, except for reports which I can make out at my leisure. Nick and Jessica in jail—"

Carol looked at him sharply. There was no disap-

pointment in his voice when he mentioned Jessica's name, rather an excitement which she had never heard before.

"Nick and Jessica in jail," he repeated, and some of the gray left his face. His eyes brightened.

"I'm sorry—" the girl murmured. She wasn't sorry at all. She was glad, but she felt she should say something, offer some condolence.

"Sorry about what?"

"Mrs. Reynolds. I'm sure you must—"

"Must feel wretched?" he took the words from her mouth.

"Quite the contrary, Carol, quite the contrary!"

He had called her Carol! Somehow, she had expected him to call her Miss Mayo—that was what she was waiting for, her body waiting for Miss Mayo as if the name were a blow that would cause her pain. Her body ready for the pain. . . .

"I'm delighted that Jessica is finally in jail," he went on. "That's where I intended her to be, that's where she should be. Only I hoped she'd be there before this. I didn't know it would take so long to put her there, or that I should become so involved putting her there. But I went ahead without reckoning on Jessica. Mighty smart woman, Carol. . . ."

For the second time she was Carol!

"Just a hunch of mine in the beginning that she was connected with the case, only the barest kind of a hunch, so slight that I was ashamed of the idea myself. Simply

that I discovered that Nick and Jessica had met in New York soon after the death of Corey Reynolds.

"I found that out when I was hunting up Nick's background before I came out here to do the actual work on the case. I figured a woman was mixed up in the racket somewhere. Don't know why except that before, when Nick was bootlegging, he wasn't working the social racket.

"I figured a woman had put him up to that—a woman who liked the social game, and Jessica fitted that bill. At that time, I hadn't seen Jessica, except some of her pictures, but when I came out here I made it a point to meet her, quite properly, of course.

"At first, she didn't know who I was, but she found out very soon, only I don't know yet how and neither she nor Nick told me this morning—probably one of their spies found out and tipped them off.

"In her woman's way, Jessica started to cultivate me, and I let her. It amused me, and it amused her. She didn't know for sure whether I suspected her until this morning. I had to let myself get more and more involved. Once she started pretending to be in love with me, I forced her to keep it up. I forced her to consent to marry me—which she didn't want to do, because she was in love with Nick."

He laughed and his laugh rang merrily through the small room. Carol laughed, too, a little shakily. But she wasn't laughing for the same reason as Paul. She was laughing because it was so preposterous that Paul

should be here with her, because she was so happy, because all these weeks she hadn't been able to laugh.

"Nobody knew what I was doing, not even Fred. I didn't confide in him at first because my hunch was sort of silly, and I don't like being made fun of. Then it became imperative that no one know what I was doing.

"I didn't want Fred to show Jessica that he knew I suspected her—and he would have, because he doesn't conceal his feelings very well. I wanted everyone who knew me and who knew Jessica to feel I was genuinely in love with her.

"Only by making her feel I was in love would I succeed in my plans.

"You have to remember that in four months here in town with constant shadowing I hadn't discovered where the gang plant was. I hadn't a thing that would convict Nick—or Jessica—or any of the people associated with them. Los Angeles is so widespread, the area so large, and Nick and the rest of them so clever at dodging that I could only wait for a break of luck.

"We've combed many districts—the district last night where Nick went to get the car he drove you away in. Couldn't find a thing there. We've been working in the district for a month. I know almost every house by heart. We've combed the district where Jessica's art school is—I did that myself, because I didn't want Fred or any of the others to get suspicious.

"I even have a list of the Helena Apartment tenants. I got the list myself, but the manager must have been

well paid. She didn't give me a clue. And I couldn't afford to frighten my gang and let them move their equipment. I had to have the plant, the press, the paper, the plates, and now I have them all—and the gang."

"Everybody?"

"All I need, because Margaret Oliver will talk. She's the only one who will. She's told me all she knows already. By the way, she was the one who put you on to the Helena. Sent you a message through her masseuse. Sent it to you instead of me, because she didn't know my home address and remembered yours.

"So already we have Nick and Jessica, and the Boleses, man and wife, wild at being taken, and Margaret. Larry is dead. I wounded him that night when I was with you and the truck charged us."

"If you hadn't been in the car last night—" Carol shuddered.

"But I was. I didn't expect Nick to keep his promise. I knew he'd double-cross me, so I went through to the alley, opened the back door of the car and slid in. I made it just in time. Had to take a chance they wouldn't put you in the tonneau—but it wasn't such a chance, because they wanted you in the front seat with them—for a target.

"I think, Carol, they would have shot you if I had given them any chance. They were desperate, remember—" Suddenly he leaned over and lifted the cuff that concealed her bandaged right wrist.

"Is it so bad?" he asked gently.

"Not at all, but the doctor says I should keep the bandage on for a couple of days."

His fingers still remained on the white bandage. "I hated to ask you to drive last night, but I couldn't help it. I couldn't drive myself with the two of them to look after—you couldn't have done that—and I didn't want any phoning done until we were back at headquarters. No tip-off to the papers. It's one of our rules. Understand?"

"Of course. I'm sorry I bungled things last night."

"But you didn't bungle! If you hadn't gone out there to the Helena, and Nick and Jessica hadn't been frightened, Nick would never have gone for the car on Temple Street, and I would be no wiser today than I was yesterday—except that you would be gone, Carol. I—couldn't stand that."

Carol held her breath. The room swam in front of her eyes.

"Jessica told me more than once that you were in love with me, Carol. She used to pretend to be jealous of you. I used to tell her that she was entirely mistaken, and she used to say that she wasn't—"

The girl's face turned crimson and she tried to draw her hand away from his, but he kept a firm gentle grip on her fingers.

"But the more I thought of it, and I thought of it a good deal—your being in love with me—the more I liked it. I haven't dared to say anything until now—

with Jessica safely away. I've wanted to ask you, though, a good many times, if she was right. Was she, Carol?"

The girl didn't answer. The color in her cheeks deepened. He found her other hand and pulled her to him.

"Carol, dear, was she right? You've got to answer me."

"She was right, Paul."

"I'm glad, dear, because I think I must have been in love with you a long time, too, only I didn't know it until that night I carried you in my arms from the car—up here."

Then she was in his arms and their lips were meeting, and he was whispering as he kissed her again and again, "It was so easy to tell Jessica I loved her when I didn't mean it, when I was laughing to myself all the time, but it's so hard to tell you I love you when I do love you so much.

"When I came here I was all set to do it, first thing I saw you, and then I couldn't, the words wouldn't come, so I started talking about the case—and talked and talked, and couldn't get where I wanted to get. I nearly foundered, Carol—"

Neither of them was looking out the window half an hour later when Fred drove up to the apartment house, so neither of them saw him park, and when he was about to get out of the car, pause and stare at the car against the curb ahead of his. It was a small coupé and he recognized it as Paul's.

After a while, Taggart started his motor and drove away. He thought he knew what the car meant in front of Carol's place, so he was ready for Paul's announcement when he returned to the office in the afternoon. Ready and braced for it.

He was glad that he hadn't told Paul about his love for Carol, glad that no one knew it but himself. It was better that way, for everyone.

THE END

THOU SHALT NOT LOVE

By

ALMA SIOUX SCARBERRY

Jocelyn Kelvin was an attractive girl . . . but plump. She took it for granted that romance would pass her by. Accordingly, she affected horn-rimmed spectacles and severe tweed suits, and, in time, became a successful adviser to lovelorn damsels, at a very good salary.

This was important, for worldly Mrs. Kelvin was still trying to maintain her social position on a restricted budget, and to find a wealthy "catch" for Jocelyn's beautiful twin, Jacqueline.

Jocelyn honestly believed that she was wedded to a career, but, after all, she was a woman. And when she accidentally heard herself referred to as a "dowdy, fat tub," it marked the outbreak of a revolution—in which Lincoln Laine, her life-long pal, and Kelcy Lowell, young and attractive doctor, all had parts.

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